

## Manka goes to work: public childcare in the Visegrad countries 1989–2009

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# MANKA GOES TO WORK

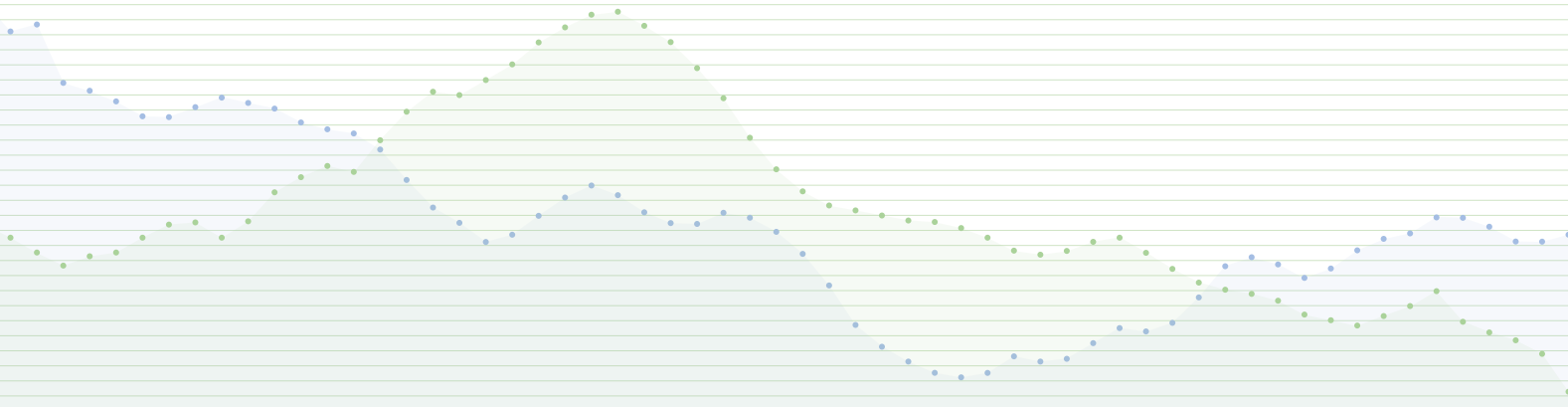
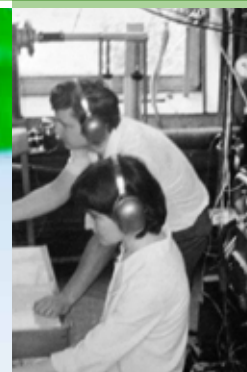
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This book was inspired by the idea that the Visegrad countries may, and perhaps should, learn from each other. This seems especially relevant in the area of childcare institutions, where they share a common socialist past and also many similarities in the transition process that affected the welfare system. At the same time, there is very little evidence on the evolution of childcare services in the region available in English.

The reference to Manka in the title reflects the shared past of the Visegrad countries. Children in Bratislava, Budapest, Prague or Warsaw would all fall silent and watch in awe the adventures of Manka and her husband Rumcajs, the rebellious cobbler of Jičín.<sup>1</sup> Bedtime stories, teaching methods, and institutional structures were all shared in the socialist era either through Comecon trade or orders from Moscow, the common source of ideology and government policies. The features of socialist institutions obviously left their mark on the present system of day care provision. The deeper the mark, the more fruitful it will be for policy makers to read this book and see what they can learn from their peers in other Visegrad governments.

Policy makers in the region face rather similar challenges: low birth rates, low employment levels and high welfare spending. This has led to growing interest in day care services, which, as the Scandinavian experience suggest, help reconcile family and work and through that provide an answer to both declining birth rates and slowing economic growth. Even those unconvinced by the recently discovered positive correlation between female employment and fertility, must look into the matter as the Barcelona targets explicitly require European governments to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age.

This book offers data and analysis on day care for children in the Visegrad countries with three aims: to assess the current situation in the region, to identify the limitations on increasing capacity in day care and to share any lessons learnt from government interventions in the area during the past twenty years. The book is a collection of papers that describe and explain the evolution of day care services, or more generally, family policy in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Each paper covers a single country with the exception of Dorottya Szikra's comparison of the Hungarian and Polish case. Some have been previously published in a local language, but most were prepared especially for this volume.

The editing and publication of this book is part of a project sponsored by the [International Visegrad Fund](#). The project also included a [workshop](#) for researchers in the area in November 2009 and the compilation of a [dataset](#) which will be available at the websites of participating institutions.

All project [participants](#) contributed to the compilation of this book by selecting, evaluating, proof reading or writing papers. The contribution of external referees Bernardina Bodnarova and Irena Kowalska is also gratefully acknowledged. Special acknowledgement is accorded to Zsuzsa Blaskó and Márta Korintus for their advice and continuous support for the project.

1 The television cartoon series was also published in book form, and some episodes got translated into English as well (e.g. Václav Čtvrtek: Rumcajs, illustrated by R. Pilař, Albatros, Prague, 2002.)

# FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DECLINE IN CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF THREE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC<sup>1</sup>

HANA HAŠKOVÁ

While Czechoslovakia had one of the highest percentage of pre-school children in formal childcare in the 1980s, the Czech and Slovak Republics are currently among the countries with the lowest percentage of children under the age of three in formal childcare while percentages of three, four and five-year-old children reach average or rather high values in European comparison. The paper analyzes causes of the decline in daycare services particularly in the Czech society by applying the conceptual frame of path dependency, and by focusing on changes in structural and cultural conditions, availability and use of daycare services from their beginning in the region. The author studies changes in availability and use of daycare services in the Czech society mainly in context of changes in female labor force participation, gender relations, family policy measures and public debates on childcare, population decline and economic prosperity that altogether contribute to explain current changes in childcare policy and practices in the Czech Republic. The author claims that the current decline in daycare services in the studied region is influenced not only by current socioeconomic trends but is truly embedded in the history of daycare services in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

After 1989, we have witnessed in the Czech Republic as well as in other countries of the former East-European block, a significant reduction in the number of pre-school childcare facilities. While the reduction in the number of kindergartens (for children aged 3-5) was rather gradual, the number of nurseries (for children under the age of 3) declined dramatically in early 1990s. At present, the number of five-year old and four-year old children in kindergartens is relatively high in the Czech Republic. However, with regard to the number of children under the age of three in pre-school childcare facilities, the Czech Republic has plunged from being among the countries with a relatively high number of children under the age of three in pre-school childcare facilities to becoming a country with the lowest degree of institutional care.

The question is: What was the reason for the reduction of the number of children placed in pre-school facilities in a relatively short period of time after political changes in the Czech Republic and why was this reduction in the case of nurseries so remarkable? I will try to find answers to these questions. I will base my paper on available literature, legal documents, national statistical records data, and survey data.

The path-dependence concept shall serve as a theoretical basis for studying the current reduction in the number of pre-school facilities. This concept highlights the importance of institutional anchoring of socio-political changes and explains why, rather than restrictions and major reforms, these changes occur more often as broadening or minor amendments of existing socio-political measures (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2000). With socio-political measures developing in a certain

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1 This paper is based on an article published in Czech in journal *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum* (see Hašková 2007). It was written with support of three grant projects: *Promotion of the social acceptance and efficient implementation of gender equality in the public sphere*, GA AS CR, no. 1QS700280503, *FEMCIT (Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: The Impact of Contemporary Women's Movement)*, 6. FP EU, no. 028746-2, and *Institutions, Myths and Beliefs: An Investigation of the Influence of Path Dependency on the Contemporary Discourses on Childcare in the Czech Republic, Sweden and France*, GA AS CR, no. IAA700280901.

direction, it is always easier for political actors to promote changes which follow this direction rather than those which do not follow it (Rose 1990). It is crucial to understand the historical development of a certain area of political decision-making (e.g. family policy) to be able comprehend present changes in the given area. Thus, in order to get an understanding of the current developments of the family policy, it is necessary to analyze previous changes in family policy. The mobilisation of individual or collective actors who benefit or could benefit from the current course of institutional changes and political decision-making is usually more successful in attaining strategic goals than the efforts of those who take measures outside of the mainstream. While political actors, as a rule, follow the direction of their predecessors in the political decision-making process and the implementation of institutional changes, the impact of these socio-political measures and institutional changes may greatly vary over time. This may be the case of the preferential treatment of a certain group which may get further extended to an ever larger group in order to eventually become a universal measure. At the same time, it is clear that the most significant changes of socio-political measures are made when there is no strong opposition to their introduction.

This article specifically deals with a historical development of pre-school childcare services in the Czech society, starting from their beginning to the present days. The developments in the availability and utilisation of daycare facilities shall be placed into context of developments in the labor market, changes in socio-political measures, gender relations, and period discourses on childcare, population development, and the country's economic prosperity, which shall serve as an explanatory framework of the documented changes in pre-school childcare policy and practice in the Czech society. The current reduction in the availability and utilisation of pre-school childcare facilities in the Czech Republic may not be fully understood without the knowledge of historical development in pre-school childcare policy and practice in the Czech society.

## ORIGINS OF PUBLIC PRE-SCHOOL CHILDCARE FACILITIES

The origins of public pre-school childcare facilities in the Czech territory date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As in other countries, there were several phases during the 19<sup>th</sup> century development characterized either by emphasizing their social or their educational (and training) function.

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first daycare facility for children aged 2-5 and the first nurseries for children under the age of three were established in the territory of the today's Czech Republic. It wasn't until 1869 that the first kindergarten was established in accordance with a French model in the territory of the today's Czech Republic. Originally, it was intended for the children aged 2-5 years of poor parents working all day (Mišurcová 1980.) While nurseries and other existing pre-school childcare facilities were, according to the ministerial ordinance of 1872, considered as nursing institutions, the duty of kindergartens was to educate and prepare children to obligatory school attendance. Thus, kindergartens were facilities to be established and operated by boards of education and communities rather than by associations and private persons.

After the establishment of Czechoslovakia, between the world wars, a long-term (also international) professional discussion about whether stress should be put on nursing care or on education and training in pre-school childcare facilities escalated. The discussion in Czechoslovakia resulted in a question of jurisdiction between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education supported by staff members of kindergartens who consistently promoted the idea of receiving the teacher status and establishing educational curricula for kindergartens (Bulíř 1990). The wording of a law to govern pre-school childcare facilities has been discussed until World War II. Therefore, new legislation that would unambiguously define individual types of and conditions for pre-school childcare facilities and services has not been passed. At that time, preschool

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childcare facilities were financed by public and private sources; hygiene and other conditions for nursing were as a rule limited by the availability of financial means provided by the establishing private person, association, or community; and there was no uniform organisational order, job description, and focus (Mišurcová 1980).

### THE IDEA OF FEMALE EMANCIPATION THROUGH THEIR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE DETACHMENT OF PUBLIC CARE OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN UNDER AND OVER THE AGE OF THREE

After World War II, focus was on the economic development of the country. In 1945, a *Decree on General Compulsory Labor* (No. 88/1945 Coll.) was issued. This decree did not make an explicit reference to women; however, female labor was considered for post-war economic recovery and the *National Women's Front* broadly discussed the issue of female participation in the labor market in the post-war period. The leadership of the *National Women's Front* comprised three representatives of each political party as well as three representatives of the *Czechoslovak Women's Council*.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the members of the People's Party, the *Czechoslovak Women's Council* and the *National Women's Front* agreed that women should have the right to take part in the labor market just like men do. This endeavor should have been backed by the state which should have facilitated both household care and care of dependants through the provision of school catering, workplace canteens, pre-school and out-of-school childcare facilities and cheap laundromats (Uhrová 2005b).

The *Košice National Program* promised to provide working women with childcare and household care services; however, a number of these services were introduced by women themselves. Regional branches of the *Czechoslovak Women's Council* were instrumental in establishing cooperative laundromats, mangle rooms, public dining-halls, and makeshift babysitting. Women's committees linked to trade unions were active in establishing pre-school childcare facilities, dining-halls, and laundromats in enterprises and agricultural cooperatives. They also organised courses for women who wanted to become nursery daycare providers (Bartošová 1969).

In the after-war period, many women decided to start working in order to ensure a reasonable economic level for their households, despite the fact that in many communities there were no pre-school childcare facilities. The rate of working women compared to the total number of all workers increased from 37% to 42% between 1948 and 1955 (Federal Statistical Office 1985). Working women established pre-school facilities in their communities by themselves, following the instructions on how to establish and organise childcare in pre-school facilities. In particular, these were children centers designed to serve the needs of 2 to 6-year old children of working parents. Generally, they were established in communities with no available kindergartens. However, hygienic conditions in these facilities were often rather poor (Bartošová 1969).

In 1948, the long overdue *Act on Uniform Education* (No. 95/1948 Coll.) firmly incorporated kindergartens into the education system. This step separated kindergartens from other pre-school facilities (nurseries and children centers). Their incorporation into the education system codified their educational function.

Other existing pre-school facilities, nurseries and children centers, were not incorporated into the education system since only employees of kindergartens had been struggling (also within international networks) to achieve the position of teachers and to establish a uniform educational curriculum. Other existing facilities were established by communities, enterprises, cooperatives or by women themselves in order to enable them to work, not to ensure their children's education. Children centers were considered as makeshift facilities operating in communities without kindergartens and their number dropped with an increase of the number of kindergartens. In fact, they were legally abolished in 1992. After World War II, nurseries,

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2 The Council was an umbrella organisation for non-profit organisations and associations (however, individual membership was also possible and female politicians from all the existing political parties, women from the *Central Council Trade Unions*, *Central Council of Cooperatives*, etc. became its members.) *Czechoslovak Women's Council* was disbanded in 1948 (Uhrová 2005a, b).



similarly to children centers, were established by women themselves on abandoned premises (which also served as a seat of other public social and preventive-healthcare establishments - e.g. as anti-tuberculosis centers) or directly in enterprises and agricultural cooperatives in order to prevent female workers from quitting their jobs. At the same time, nurseries experienced staff shortage that was solved by using housewives who responded to public appeals offering crash courses and subsequently nursing jobs.

In 1948, the function of kindergartens, which were designed to provide care of pre-school children from the age of 3, was institutionalized as educational and their operation became the responsibility of the Ministry of Education whereas nurseries, that were intended as facilities providing care of children under the age of three, were as part of the 1952 health care reform classified into the group of preventive-healthcare facilities in accordance with the Soviet model. In the post-war period characterized by high infant and child mortality rates, undernourishment, rationing, inadequate sanitary conditions and the related threat of epidemics, health care reform promised a significant improvement of health care availability. As in other countries of the former East-European block, nurseries were made the responsibility of the Ministry of Health which stipulated strict hygienic (almost hospital-like) criteria concerning the operation of nurseries which had previously been spontaneously established on the premises with poor hygiene standards. Unqualified daycare providers were gradually replaced by pediatric nurses, the buildings in which nurseries were housed were refurbished and a rule was introduced for a pediatrician to come to nurseries once a week to perform preventive medical checks of nursery children (Jančíková 1979; Klíma 1969). The internationally unique placing of nurseries under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health in former East-European block countries is to be understood both in the context of the post-war situation during which this region experienced a mass recruitment of female labor and in the context of long working hours, and the idea of a maximum externalisation of childcare and household care to be adjusted to the ongoing expansion of round-the-clock enterprises which also contributed to the establishment of weekly nurseries where children spent days and nights during the working week and parents only collected them on weekends.

The number of kindergartens, nurseries and children centers increased in the 1950s although there was a substantial drop in the fertility rate<sup>3</sup>. This went hand in hand with an increase in the number of children of respective age groups attending these facilities. The percentage of children under three in nurseries increased from 3% to 13% between 1950 and 1970. The percentage of 3-5-year old children in kindergartens increased from 26% to 56% during the same period. In addition, whereas in the late 1940s 80% of kindergarten children attended kindergartens only for half a day, in the late 1950s these facilities were attended by only 12% children and from the second half of the 1960s almost all kindergarten children attended all-day facilities (see data in Bulíř 1990).<sup>4</sup> At the beginning, the dividing line between children under three years of age attending nurseries and pre-school children of at least three years of age attending kindergartens was not strictly observed due to the lack of the respective facilities in individual communities; however, with an increasing number of these facilities, the dividing line gradually became respected.

The institutionalisation of kindergartens as educational facilities (providing appropriate, uniform education facilitating school enrollment) and nurseries as preventive health and social facilities (ensuring that children are healthy and their mothers are able to work) was significant with respect to their operational rules, as well as with regard to their operators. Kindergartens in communities were almost exclusively established by educational authorities. In the 1960s, the percentage of enterprise/cooperative kindergartens only comprised 1% of all kindergartens while in case of nurseries this percentage reached approximately the level of 27% already in the 1950s, which was maintained until the end of the 1980s (Bulíř 1990).

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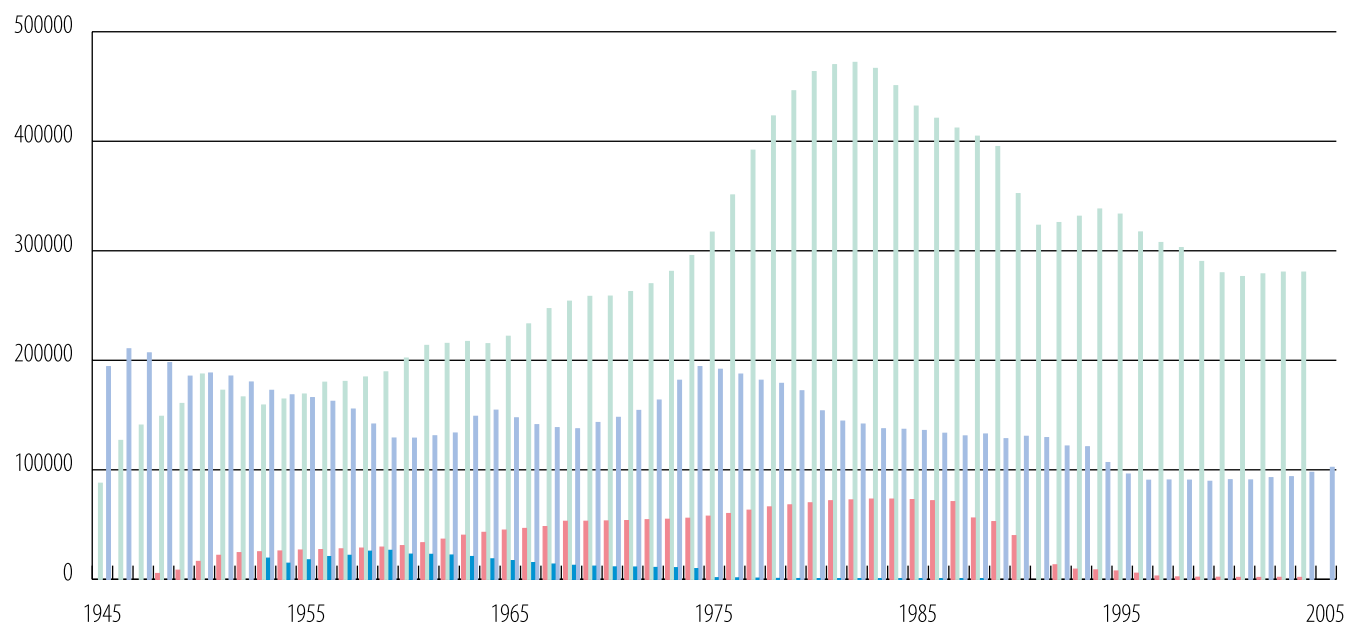
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3 The total fertility rate dropped from 2.8 children per woman below the level necessary for maintaining reproduction (2.1 children per woman) in the 1950s.

4 All-day facilities were those that provided childcare for approximately ten hours (No. 195/1948 Coll.)





**Figure 1. Children/places in nurseries, children centers and kindergartens (1945–2005)**

Source: Czech statistical Office at [www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz); Bulíř 1990.

The Czech society has maintained a rather skeptical view of nurseries despite their political support. Research from the second half of the 1950s suggests that only one third of employed pregnant women and mothers of children under one year of age would place their child into nurseries if they had a chance (Srb and Kučera 1959). The reason for skepticism was their frequent closure due to mass infection that also had a negative impact on the perception of female labor which has been regarded as unstable due to their taking care of sick children. However, in the second half of the 1950s, approximately two thirds of working mothers returned back to work out of which a little over 50% returned back to work right after maternity leave (lasting 18 weeks at that time). In the majority of cases, these children were taken care of by their grandmothers (Srb and Kučera 1959.)

In the 1950s, there was a political will to both use female labor force participation in national economy facing labor shortage and to reverse birth rate decline. In the above-mentioned research of the late 1950s, demographers studied whether these two political aims are not contradictory. However, based on studies of the attitudes of Czech population, they concluded that female labor force participation itself does not lead to birth rate reduction. The researchers, however, believed that conditions for the working activities of mothers need to be improved. In addition to housing projects and the construction of additional pre-school facilities, they specifically proposed a gradual reduction in working hours, in particular for mothers, as part of the population policy. However, they added that most enterprises and offices oppose the idea of shorter working hours for operational reasons (Srb and Kučera). Articles published in Czechoslovak newspapers in the 1950s confirm that the Czechoslovak society was facing the problem of labor shortage and forced overtime working necessary to fulfill political and

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- live births
- children in children centers
- children in kindergartens
- places in nurseries



economic plans but it also had to cope with low labor productivity and a high rate of absenteeism for which also working mothers were criticized who had to stay away from work to care for their sick children. It all led to further criticism of working mothers who were regarded as an unreliable labor force and to enterprises and cooperatives being reluctant to provide the option of working part-time since there was fear that part-time working would further decrease the existing low labor productivity (Documents from Open Society Archive on the topic of women and labor in 1951-1961, HU OSA 300-30-2-208.)

## THE POLICY PATH OF EXTENDING MATERNITY LEAVE

The 1950s were characterized by an increased entry of female labor into production. A mass construction of pre-school facilities has begun although grandmothers were still the most frequently used childcare “institution” for working mothers. In the 1960s, the tendency of a growing female labor force participation and an increasing number of pre-school facilities prevailed. Unlike the situation in the 1950s, mothers were mostly employed and stayed, due to the length of the maternity leave, with their small children at home only for a few months. However, there have been voices speaking out against mass employment of women. These voices gained further prominence as the acute labor shortage of the 1950s was subsiding in the 1960s, criticism of low labor productivity and absenteeism increased and the total fertility rate further declined.

In the 1960s, the *State Population Committee* started organizing empirical research projects dealing with the relationships between female employment and fertility under the pressure of political debates of low fertility rate. Many of these research projects were drawn up in order to use their results to formulate or validate the impact of pro-population measures comprising, *inter alia*, the prolongation of the paid maternity leave to 26 weeks and the introduction of additional unpaid maternity leave until the age of one of the child (Bartošová 1976.) Pediatricians visiting nurseries, together with child psychologists, at the time studied also the relationship between female employment on the one hand and sickness rate and psychological development of children on the other hand. Pediatric studies pointed to an increased sickness rate of infants attending nurseries and psychological studies emphasized the possible consequences of long-term institutionalized childcare (in children’s homes and infants’ homes) and long-term stays of children in both weekly nurseries and daily nurseries in terms of their psychic deprivation. On average, about 30 children attended each nursery each day, which was usually opened 10-12 hours a day (Jančíková 1979). This medical and psychological debate in the 1960s contributed to the reduction of the number of weekly nurseries but also to the prolongation of maternity leave and the introduction of additional unpaid maternity leave. In the 1960s, also older-age women (grandmothers) were mostly employed and enterprises did not face an acute labor shortage any more but rather a shortage of qualified labor and low work productivity which triggered a public debate of the negative impact of “overemployment of women” and latch-key kids (Wagnerová 2007).

In particular, criticism of all-day childcare facilities was aimed at nurseries, much less at kindergartens. While kindergartens were, with regard to their institutionalisation, regarded as educational facilities intended for pre-school children, nurseries were considered as health and social institutions, existing only to allow mothers to work. Since there was no acute shortage of labor any more, rather than kindergartens, it was the nurseries that were challenged due to their expensive construction and operation.

Initiatives were taken in the 1960s to improve the environment of nurseries by their “demedicalisation” and “humanisation.” Along with kindergartens, nurseries were classified among “pre-school facilities”; the prolongation of the paid maternity leave to 26 weeks and the introduction of additional unpaid maternity leave until the age of one implied

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a decrease in the number of the smallest – several week-old – infants in nurseries; and also joint facilities of nursery and kindergarten were introduced. However, institutional segregation of nurseries and kindergartens at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s has successfully blocked any attempts of nursery “demedicalisation”. The number of joint facilities of nursery and kindergarten has remained low since their operation was rather difficult due to the different administration of nurseries and kindergartens. The efforts of the 1960s to institutionally redefine nurseries and place them fully under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education hasn’t been successful and, thus, nurseries remained the responsibility of the Ministry of Health.

During the same period, in the 1960s, less significant efforts to introduce micro-nurseries in addition to nurseries were taken, mostly in communities with a higher demand of nurseries. These were arrangements when the mother of an older child who had been trained by a local physician and a nurse took care of a small group of children under the age of three (e.g. three children) in her own home.

At the same time, the idea was discussed of further prolongation of additional maternity leave to reach a total of three years so that the critically regarded, medically operated nurseries gradually start serving only those children whose mothers cannot stay at home for three years, namely the children of single mothers and career mothers. The idea of a three-year additional maternity leave that was to lead to a lower demand of expensive and controversial nurseries has been discussed from the 1960s; however, it wasn’t until the 1980s that an actual prolongation of additional maternity leave and maternity allowance for women, taking full-time care of their children, to three years took place (Klíma 1969).

At the time when many feminists west of the Czechoslovak border fought for the public support of pre-school daycare facilities necessitated by their gradual entry into the labor market (often working part-time) and others struggled for mother’s wage, it was the *Czechoslovak Union of Women* that, in addition to improved quality, diversity and availability of public all-day childcare facilities, called for rehabilitation of care and motherhood through the prolongation of maternity leave to 2-3 years (Čáková 2005; Jechová 2008).

Even though there were disputes among members of the *Czechoslovak Union of Women* on the topic, the demand to extension of the additional maternity leave up the child’s age of two to three was finally included in the *Action Program*. Some members of the *Czechoslovak Union of Women* argued that the rise in women’s employment was not an adequate indicator of women’s emancipation and wanted care to occupy a position equal to paid employment. Others feared that the extension of the additional maternity leave would have negative impact on women’s position on the labor market and thus also on women’s liberation (Čáková 2005).

The *Czechoslovak Union of Women* in that time demanded not only the extension of additional maternity leave up to two or three years, but among others also the formulation of economic measures to motivate firms to create part-time jobs, the reduction of the working hours of mothers to 6 hours a day while retaining full wages, the reduction of opening hours in nurseries from 12 to 6 hours a day, the inclusion of pedagogical goals to nursery guidelines, the securing more and better qualified staff in nurseries, and the improvement of supply of goods and services for families. Interestingly the *Czechoslovak Union of Women* did not claim that fathers should have the right to the childcare leave. It was argued instead that mothers’ should have the choice to use quality childcare facilities or to stay at home to provide care for their children. Unlike the 1950s, the professional and political discourse assumed that women would not necessarily have to combine paid work and care, but their activities will be divided into several life stages (education/training stage – reproductive stage – labor/productive stage) (Čáková 2005).

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The above-mentioned facts show that the *Action Program of the Czechoslovak Union of Women* responded to a high stress of working mothers, further aggravated by the shortage economy, whose performance at work (mostly full-time) was underestimated<sup>5</sup> and permanently criticized, namely in the situation of the growing criticism of nurseries in professional circles.

It has to be mentioned that as the *Czechoslovak Union of Women* only spoke of men as women's "helpers" with regard to taking care of children and households, the family policy failed to strengthen men's participation in childcare. In fact, legislation during the entire socialist era did not provide for equal conditions of men in terms of childcare. Similarly, there were no efforts of using gender-neutral formulations within the family policy, e.g. it wasn't until 1990 and 2000 that the term "maternity allowance" was changed to "parental allowance" and the term "additional maternity leave" was changed to "parental leave" respectively. The emancipation project of women in the 1950s was based on their integration into gainful activities with the help of the state that was to establish childcare facilities while there was no mention of the changed role of men. In parallel, legislative changes aimed at the provision for a prolonged childcare in families in the 1960s were designed only for women. The state that was to provide both financial support to women during the childcare period and security of retaining their jobs, as well as to include the number of childcare years into the total number of years worked when calculating old-age pension. Again, these measures applied to women only.

#### **PRO-POPULATION POLICY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTRAL-EUROPEAN MODEL OF A HIGH SUPPORT OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT AND ALL-DAY CARE OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF THREE BY THEIR MOTHERS**

In the 1950s women mostly worked as unqualified manual workers and in the 1960s their focus shifted to non-manual professions, while in the 1970s and 1980s, there were a number of women who were highly qualified. Thus, reconciling work and family life within so-called dual-career marriages has become a highly topical issue.

At the same time, after the Soviets put an end to the Czechoslovak democratisation efforts in 1968, the state tried to pacify the nation by providing it with a greater choice of consumer goods and the citizens, rather than on public life, focused on their private lives. Political discussions of the low fertility rate resulted in the introduction of a number of pro-population measures in the 1970s. More frequently than ever before, families with children were supported by means various social measures (marriage loans with a decreasing interest according to the number of children, tax exemptions for children, free textbooks and other teaching aids for children of school age, housing allowances, travel allowances, etc.) In addition, the network of pre-school, school and out-of-school childcare and educational facilities has been further developed. The percentage of children aged 3-5 years in kindergartens thus increased between the early 1970s and the late 1980s from 56% to 81% and the percentage of the respective age group in nurseries from 13% to 18%.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, also the policy path of the prolongation of additional maternity leave introduced as early as in the 1960s was followed so that mothers could choose whether they preferred to use childcare facilities or provide care to their children at home until the age of three of the children. The requirement of part-time work for mothers has been provided for in legislature; however, it hasn't been implemented in practice due to restriction in the labor market, unwillingness of employers, and low salaries of women. In accordance with the gradual extension of additional maternity leave, mothers tended to stay at home to care for their children gradually longer and longer; however, they usually started working full-time upon termination of the additional maternity leave.

Gradually, the model of two-income family was established in Czechoslovakia in line with the developments of the family policy during the socialist era. This model, however, was based on the pattern when men and women worked full-time

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<sup>5</sup> Income of women from gainful activities accounted for approximately 64-71% of the income of men (Hašková and Uhde eds. 2009). Despite being discussed in the Czechoslovak media as frequently as the criticism of sleep deficit of working women and their lack of free time compared with working men, this fact was usually explained by lower qualifications of female workers rather than by discrimination against women in the labor market (Documents from Open Society Archive on the topic of women and labour in 1951-1961 and 1967-1971, HU OSA 300-30-2-208 and HU OSA 300-30-4-317).

<sup>6</sup> If we include children under the age of three attending kindergartens, then the total percentage of children under the age of three attending both nurseries and kindergartens in the late 1980s reached some 22% (see data in Bulíř 1990).

while salaries of women were one third lower than those of men and the career of women was interrupted whereas the career of men was continuous. In the Czech environment, the historic classification of pre-school facilities into less popular “medicalized” nurseries for children under the age of three and more popular educational kindergartens for pre-school children from the age of three contributed, together with the introduction of additional maternity leave until the age of three of the child, to seeing the age of three as a significant dividing line for transfer between family care into institutionalized care.

The construction of pre-school facilities in the 1950s was driven by female labor force participation and idea of emancipation of women, while measures aimed at extending additional maternity leave to three years of the child, which were launched in the 1960s as part of pro-population policy, were explicitly introduced in order to reduce the demand of critically judged nurseries which were the only widely used institutions providing care of pre-school children under the age of three (Klíma 1969). While in the 1960s Czech experts mostly believed that the child needs permanent maternal care during the first year (with corresponding legislation that provided for the introduction of additional maternity leave until the age of one of the child), other voices were also expressed that the optimum length of intense motherly care should be three years (Marušiak 1964). In general, there was no unambiguous empirical evidence of the ideal length of intense motherly care of the child (Machonin et al. 1966), only criticism and empirical evidence of the negative impact of too many hours spent in all-day childcare facilities on some children (Klíma 1969; Dunovský 1971). However, the issue of the optimum length of all-day motherly care and the harmful effects of institutional care on pre-school children has been raised and discussed in connection with a permanent shortage of all-day childcare facilities, their high operational costs and inefficient use, as well as the inefficient work of employed mothers who have to care for their sick children.

The *Czechoslovak Union of Women* in the late 1960s required both the extension of additional maternity leave to the age of 2-3 years of the child and the reduction of opening hours of all-day childcare facilities (from 12 to 6 hours a day) accompanied by the possibility of part-time work (mostly for 6 hours) without any reduction of their salaries. However, general unwillingness of enterprises to introduce part-time work schemes and the criticism of the labor force of mothers effectively hindered the establishment of a higher flexibility in the labor market aimed at the provision of a more family-friendly environment (Čáková 2005; Jechová 2008). As a result, instead of using part-time working schemes and a shorter period of time spent in childcare institution, mothers in fact could only return to work full-time after maternity leave and use all-day pre-school childcare facilities or stay with a child at home full-time. The latter possibility was gradually promoted for children until the age of three and this age limit became both widely discussed and institutionalized. In the 1950s, the number of months for which mothers stayed with their first child at home was widely diverse, while in the 1960s mothers stayed at home with their first child for the shortest period of time in the entire socialist era, in the 1970s this period has gradually been prolonged to reach the limit of three years generally applied in the 1980s (see Table 1). In the 1960s, there was a criticism of long-term institutional care of pre-school children and a generally rather relaxed atmosphere of this period enabled testing different alternatives to institutionalized pre-school childcare facilities and the formulation of requirements with regard to a higher flexibility in reconciling work and family life. However, many of these requirements have been turned down, alternative models of institutionalized childcare remained to be developed and, as a reaction to the critical discourse of the 1960s, an option has been chosen to extend additional maternity leave to the age of three of the child. In the 1970s and 1980s, when people withdrew from public life, this idea was generally accepted, followed, and gradually internalized as a social norm reflected in an increased support by the population of the idea that children should be taken care of by the family until the age of three (Čáková 1973; 1977; Kreipl 1978.)

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Child born in:	0–12 months	13–24 months	25–36 months	More than 36 months	Total
1960–1969	61	15	17	7	100
1970–1979	44	34	17	5	100
1980–1989	25	30	37	8	100
1990–2002	5	17	51	27	100

**Table 1. Number of years Czech mothers spent ‘on leave’ with their 1st child according to the year the child was born (in %)**

Source: ISSP 2002.

Women remained main childcarers but they also were co-breadwinners. Men remained breadwinners but there was no political will or public demand for them to get equal rights in childcare and equal share in childcare practice. Thus, the promised female emancipation failed to bring about genuine gender equality. The above-mentioned development of the family policy under the conditions of real socialism resulted in a generally high (support of) female participation in the labor market where women worked full-time, as well as a significant support of motherly home care of pre-school children under the age of three. This situation is common in all Visegrad countries whose developments in family policies and the practice of childcare are to a large extent similar to those of the Czech Republic (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006).

## **GENDER CONSERVATIVE TRENDS OF POST-1989 SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND STRENGTHENING OF NEOLIBERAL TRENDS IN CHILDCARE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

In the late 1980s, the Czech society was far from reaching gender equality; however, there was no threat to female labor force participation in centrally-planned economy with virtually no unemployment. The percentage of women (and mothers) compared to the total number of the employed was high in the European context.

The pressure of unemployment, orientation to individualism and gender-conservative attitudes towards care of small children in the 1990s have materialized in the development of gender-blind policies which contributed to a rather unstable position of mothers in the labor market and to the shift of income poverty from single-member households to families with children.

Compared to a number of other countries of the former East-European block, there was a relatively slow increase in unemployment in the Czech Republic in early 1990s, in particular due to state regulations which made some population groups leave the labor market. These groups comprised, in particular, working retirees, people in pre-retirement age, who applied for premature retirement if they lost their jobs, and also mothers of small children (Sirovátka 2004). According to Víšek (2006), the latter option was highlighted by the World Bank as one of possible strategies for these countries to ease the pressures in changing East-European labor markets. In the mid-1990s, when a significant increase in unemployment was expected due to the planned restructuring measures on the market, the period for which parental allowance for parents providing all-day

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care to their children (in fact, 99% of them were women) was paid was prolonged to four years. However, parental leave (then called “additional maternity leave”) and the related obligation of the employer to reemploy the parent after the leave wasn’t prolonged and remained three years.

The entire 1990s witnessed a rapid reduction of the number of pre-school facilities. Enterprise facilities disappeared during restructuring and privatisation in the labor market. Children centers and joint facilities of nursery and kindergarten legally ceased to exist. The reduction of the number of kindergartens was largely equal to the significant drop in birth rate.<sup>7</sup> Thus, more than three thirds of all three-year-old children and more than 90% of all 4 and 5-year-old children attend kindergartens (mostly public kindergartens with regulated fees equal to approximately 3% of the family income (Kuchařová and Svobodová 2006). However, nurseries have been through a far more dramatic reduction. Although economic responsibility for running childcare facilities was given to the local governments, the Ministry of Education gave subsidies to kindergartens. However, nurseries were excluded from preschool facilities after 1989 due to the fact that they remained defined as preventive-healthcare facilities. Thus, nurseries were not allowed to receive subsidies from the Ministry of Education, which limited their operation and posed a threat to their very existence. Operators of nurseries and parents using their services are systemically disadvantaged since the parent making regular use of pre-school childcare provided by nurseries lose the parental allowance which was originally intended for the mother (later the parent) providing all-day care to a child under a certain age. At the same time, the state provides no subsidies to nurseries. However, if the child attends a kindergarten, the state (in fact, the Ministry of Education) supports its education and care in the kindergarten through a subsidy provided to kindergartens and if the child is taken care of by full-time parent or uses services of a private person substituting all-day parental care, the state (in fact, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs) again supports its care through the parental allowance which at present serves as an allowance for the provision of all-day care to a child not using childcare facilities.

Consequently, the operation of nurseries became very expensive for local governments, as well as parents. Even though there was a tendency to include nurseries among preschool facilities in the 1960s, the reform that would wholly include nurseries under the control of the Ministry of Education has never materialized due to the subsequent development that rather put stress on the extension of additional maternity leave up to the child’s age of three.

At present, nurseries may accept less than 3% of the total number of children which could have been placed in nurseries in the late 1980s. Their total number varies and reaches some 50 facilities in the entire country, with the majority of them located in larger cities. Most of them are private and their fees differ greatly. At present, only 0.5% of the children in the corresponding age group are placed in nurseries (Kuchařová and Svobodová 2006.) The demand of non-family care provision to children under the age of three that exceeded the number of available children places in nurseries (or in other alternative institutions providing care to children under the age of three) led to a gradual increase in the number of children under the age of three registered in kindergartens. These children may be accepted in the case of vacancies. While in the late 1980s, the percentage of children under the age of three registered in kindergartens reached 3%, at present this figure is 9%. Thus, the total percentage of children aged 0-3 years registered in different childcare institutions, i.e. nurseries but mostly in kindergartens, is approximately 9%. This is due to the fact that one fourth of children two year of age are registered in kindergartens at present (compared with 11-12% of these children in the mid 1990s.) The above-mentioned data suggest that, to a certain extent, kindergartens started compensating for missing nurseries. Given the increase in birth rate in recent years reflecting the situation when children are born to parents who were born as the baby-boom

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7 The overall fertility rate dropped from 1.9 children per woman in 1989 to 1.1 children per woman in 1999. At present, when baby-boom generation of the 1970s reached an adult age the level reached 1.3 children per woman.



generation of the 1970s it may be expected that this practice will soon come to an end. The number of kindergarten applications refused for insufficient capacities of kindergartens significantly grows. In 2000-2006, there was an increase from some 2,000 to almost 10,000 applications. And the fact is that one of the reasons, for which 40% of mothers did not go back to work after their three-year parental leave was over, were difficulties in getting their child placed in a kindergarten (Kuchařová et al. 2006). In addition, kindergarten registration of a child under the age of three does not necessarily mean that the child really attends the facility. With regard to the insufficient number of places in pre-school childcare facilities and the system of kindergarten financing which are the only childcare facilities for preschool children receiving financial support from the Ministry of Education (based on the number of registered children), some kindergartens allow the inscription of children under the age of three at the beginning of the school-year; however, they allow their attendance in the respective school-year only after they reach the three year age limit.

The policy path of having nurseries to care for children under the age of three and of defining nurseries as preventive-healthcare facilities influenced not only the post-1989 decline in the number of nurseries but it hindered also the possibilities of private childcare alternatives for children under the age of three from arising. Due to the historical division of pre-school childcare institutions to preventive-healthcare nurseries for children under the age of three and educational kindergartens for preschool children over the age of three, a newly introduced possibility of private undertaking after 1989 in pre-school childcare was again divided into two separate domains for children in these two age groups. Since nurseries remained preventive-healthcare facilities, even private child-minders were required to have a medical certificate to be allowed to care for children under the age of three! This once again limited both the offer and the use of this type of childcare. Only 1-2% of families in the Czech Republic regularly make use of individual paid childcare (Kuchařová and Svobodová 2006). On the other hand, the private person providing care to children over the age of three is not limited by the necessity to have specific education since there is no historical perception of necessary health care education for non-family childcare providers caring for children over the age of three.

The fact that there was no pressure from the civil society to deal with the task contributed to the decline in the number of preschool facilities. At the beginning of the 1990s, only a few predicted the negative effects of the gendered model of dual-earner family established in the society that promoted men's continuous work career and women's interrupted work career, with several years spent providing full-time childcare, when applied in the circumstance of market economy.

Even though a number of women's civic organisations and groups were established, they focused on other topics rather than childcare during the 1990s. The postponement of childbearing happened mainly among women with university degrees who would be interested in nurseries and shorter childcare leave more than women with lower education.

The changes in the labor market during the 1990s, a limited number of places in pre-school childcare facilities and a longer period of receiving parental allowance for full-day childcare by a parent led, on the one hand, to a more difficult placement of children in pre-school childcare facilities but, on the other hand, it also resulted in a wider acceptance of full-time motherly childcare in two-parent families which, in some cases, was also necessitated by lay-offs in the period of socio-economic transformation. The situation was also reflected in mother's behavior of whom a round one fourth stayed at home to provide full-time care to their small children for more than three years (see Table 1).

The prolonged payment of parental allowance for parents providing full-time care to their children was in line with socio-political measures of the 1990s. These measures focused on maintaining social peace and gaining acceptance of economic reforms through introducing social transfers and alleviating pressures in the labor market by offering pre-retirement schemes

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or granting financial support to parents providing full-time care to their children. In both cases, a certain percentage of people, who mostly probably would have been unemployed, were concealed in the group of economically inactive people<sup>8</sup> receiving at the same time a certain income (parental allowance or reduced pension).

However, this policy which was not accompanied by an effective employment policy in the 1990s, led in the case of mothers to the situation when motherhood has the most pronounced negative impact on female employment rate in the Czech Republic when compared to other European countries. The indicator measuring the difference in the employment rate of women aged 20-49 with a child under the age of six shows that motherhood has the strongest effect on women's leaving the labor market in the Czech Republic compared to other European countries (European Commission 2006.) While the difference in the employment of mothers aged 20-49 with children under the age of three compared with other women of the same age is 13 percentage points in EU15 and EU27, in the Czech Republic the difference is 41%, in Hungary 34%, in Slovakia 33% and in Germany 27% (European Commission 2008). It can't be claimed that the negative effect of motherhood on female labor force participation has only been caused by the long parental leave without subsequent marginalisation of mothers in the labor market. In the European comparison of mothers with children under the age of 12, Czech and Hungarian mothers are once again those with the lowest employment rate. In the Czech Republic, 89% of women aged 20-44 with no children under the age of 12 are employed but only 58% of women in the same age group who have children under the age of 12 (Czech Statistical Office at [www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz)). Similarly, research performed in businesses in European countries has shown that the highest number of company managers who declared a practice of terminating work contracts with their female employees after their return from parental leave was in the Czech Republic. Thus, in fact, these employees can't return to their previous employer after parental leave (Riedmann 2006).

At present, 52% of mothers finish their parental leave by terminating their previous employment and only 48% of mothers return back to their employer (Kuchařová et al. 2006.) Mother who do not return to their previous employment may do so for the following reasons: (a) on their own decision; (b) due to business wind-up; (c) if they are offered a position in line with their employment contract which they can't accept; (d) if they are laid-off in case no suitable position is available and they receive financial compensation. The majority of mothers who don't return to their previous employer later or sooner find a position with another employer. However, if we compare the situation of mothers who took parental leave in the early 1990s and who did so later we see a clear deterioration: Compared to the early 1990s, there were more unemployed mothers who terminated their parental leave and fewer those who found employment with a different employer in the late 1990s or after 2000 (Křížková ed. 2007).

At present, the majority of mothers stay at home to care for their child for three years. When the child is about to turn three, they try to place it to a pre-school facility - kindergarten - and find a position in the labor market for themselves. Around 80% of Czech mothers with no higher education (and 68% of university graduates) prefer to stay at home to care for their 1-3 year-old child. After that, the majority prefers to start working using some kind of family-friendly flexible working schemes (Křížková ed. 2007).

However, these schemes are still rather an exception in the Czech labor market. Czech employees are less autonomous than their Western European counterparts in deciding about the length and arrangement of their working time or place of employment (Wallace 2003). While Czech mothers prefer to work part-time or use another flexible working arrangement upon their return to work after parental leave, international comparison shows that the Czech Republic ranks among those countries where there is the smallest number of women working part-time after parental leave (Riedmann

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8 E.g. students, pensioners, disability pensioners, people on parental leave, etc. count among economically inactive people.

2006.) Up to 70% of mothers have fixed working hours, with the beginning and the end of working time fixed by their employer (Hašková and Uhde eds. 2009).

In practice, Czech mothers usually have the same choice as before, i.e. either stay at home as full-time childcare providers for a certain period of time or return to full-time work, with their employer fixing their working hours and place of employment.

Already in the late 1990s, it became indisputably clear that mothers' long-term unemployment and economic inactivity experienced a steady rise. During the EU accession process, the Czech Republic was criticized for its neglect of an active and effective employment policy. These facts together with the fact that the birth rate has started to increase again and thus the number of outstanding applications to kindergartens rose rapidly, contributed to women's groups' growing interest in childcare policies. Some contacts between women's civic organisations and women's politicians, especially from the Social Democratic Party, has already been established and influenced several legislative amendments on childcare that aimed to increase the flexibility of paid parental leave as a way to help mothers return to work. These changes came largely from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the main coordinator of policies promoting equal opportunities since the EU accession process.

Women's organisations started criticizing the inflexibility of parental allowance that was given to full-time caring mothers only. Consequently, several legislative amendments were made so that a parent receiving parental allowance is allowed to have unlimited income from gainful work activity and to use childcare facilities for a limited number of days/hours a month even though parental allowance is still defined as an allowance for a person providing full-time childcare. Moreover, the childcare allowance was increased to 40% of the average wage in the public sector in 2007, making it easier for some parents to afford private childcare, as well as to leave the labor market and care for their children at home. In the same year, private child-minders of children under the age of three were allowed to have not only medical education but also education in care services. In 2008, a three-tier system of parental leave was established that is based on the idea that the shorter the leave (2, 3 or 4 years), the higher the pay per month. However, since virtually no places are available at nurseries, private child-minders providing care of children under the age of three are too expensive and the legal system of their operation is still in flux, even if mothers would want to return to work earlier, they have only a few possibilities to do so.

Part of the problem has been inherited from the past institutional arrangements. Even though it is widely accepted in the country today that the Soviet model of preventive-healthcare nurseries does not comply with the present situation, neither of the other ministries that are responsible for childcare issues (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs) is interested in providing support to nurseries once they do not exist because the costs of building new nurseries (or other childcare facilities for children under the age of three) that would comply with the present situation would be too high. Another possibility was to accept children under the age of three to kindergartens. However, this idea has been strongly opposed by kindergarten teachers who maintain that classes in kindergartens are too big for children under the age of three (in terms of the number of children), pre-school curricula are not suitable for children of this age, and the number of childcare providers is too low.

Recently, the government has been trying to promote the development of private child-minders, which is in accordance with the notion that children under the age of three should be cared for at home. Possible consequences of such implicitly gender-conservative and care services privatizing model, including perpetuation of care work as underpaid work provided either by mothers or socially and economically disadvantaged female migrants, instead of interconnecting recognition of care with redistribution claims, have not been thoroughly discussed either on the political scene or by the civil society.

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Current political discussions on childcare misuse neoliberal rhetorics of the “right to choose” to perpetuate gender and socioeconomic inequalities in the society if used in the gender-conservative environment, growing trends to privatisation of care services and impact of globalizing market economies on private lives without reflecting upon them.

The age limit of three years is still considered to be a “naturally” imposed dividing line between the suitability of collective care on the one hand and of individual care on the other hand. In 2009, the Czech Minister of Labor and Social Affairs declared at the European meeting of ministers of labor and social affairs, also with the view of opening a discussion and challenging Barcelona goals for institutional pre-school childcare, that these goals would never have been approved if new Member States accessing the EU in 2004 were already members in 2002. His speech made it clear that the Czech Republic shall not provide its support to public pre-school facilities for children under the age of three.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the paper, I highlighted some of the causes of the recent decrease in support of all-day preschool childcare facilities in the Czech society and in particular in the case of nurseries which experienced a significant decrease in support. At the same time, I pointed out the importance of path dependency in influencing current childcare policies and cultures of care that differ among EU countries. For example, the Soviet model of preventive-healthcare nurseries was applied in all Visegrad countries that consequently influenced the post-1989 decline in nurseries in those countries. Moreover, the idea that it is the best when children stay exclusively in mothers’ full-time care until they reach three years of age is accepted and put in practice more in Visegrad countries than in the majority of the old EU15 countries.

A network of all-day pre-school childcare facilities has been gradually introduced since the 1950s as part of the support provided to the model of work and family life reconciliation. Institutionalisation of pre-school childcare in the Czech territory has traditionally been based on separation of childcare provided to children under the age of three and preschool education and upbringing of children over the age of three. This separation had a bearing on the establishment of two different types of pre-school childcare facilities, extension of additional maternity leave (later parental leave) until the age of three of a child, considering the age limit of three years as a dividing line between collective professional/educational care and individual family care and, after 1989 on abolition of nurseries while maintaining support of kindergartens, and restraining the development of alternative models of institutionalized care of children under the age of three. In the context of transformation of Czech society after 1989, historical institutionalisation of the concept of medicalized care of children under the age of three, which is separated from pre-school education and upbringing of older children, together with the policy path of extension of paid all-day continuous motherly care provided to children of pre-school age have led to a rapid decrease in the availability of institutionalized care of younger pre-school children and even effectively prevented an increase in alternative care of pre-school children under the age of three.

In the late 1960s, the idea was formulated to prolong maternity leave up to three years so that nurseries become demanded by single mothers and highly carrier-oriented women only. Even though its extension to three years happened only later in time, in the 1980s, Czech women stayed at home to care for their children in average more years than in the 1970s when they stayed at home for a longer period than in the 1960s. The childcare policies and the culture of care then continued down this path even after 1989. Since the 1990s, Czech women stayed at home to care for their children in average even more years than in the 1980s. While at the beginning of the 1990s, women had more choice

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9 See <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/barcelon-ske-cile---projev-ministra-p--necase-53292/> and <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/reakce-ceskeho-predsednictvi-na-prohlaseni-evropske-socialistick-strany-53174/>.

between using daycare and caring for their children at home, in the new millennium, the number of places in daycare facilities available to children under the age of three was already too low to make a choice. Since childcare facilities for children under the age of three are not available in the Czech society but market oriented societies bring the need for childcare services, there is a growing tendency to privatize care services that tend to reproduce gender and socio-economic inequalities.

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The provision of day care for children is, according to the European Commission, one of the key tools for reconciling family and professional roles. The Commission's increased interest in this topic dates back to the Madrid European Council in 1995 and further it was expressed e.g. in the Lisbon Treaty and various other policies and analytical papers, among others at the Barcelona summit, or in the fourth pillar of the Employment Guidelines.<sup>1</sup> Various views on childcare were discussed during the Czech EU Presidency in 2009 at the conference "[Parental childcare and employment policy: conflict, or complementarity?](#)". The discussion on country-specific features and the all-embracing context of achieving the Barcelona targets focused primarily on the quality of childcare in its various forms and its role in increasing the employment of women. The official standpoint of the Czech Government has been summarized in a press release as follows: "The Presidency strived to strengthen home-based parental care for the very small children, and recognized it as a fully valuable equivalent of a paid job. In particular, it pointed out the necessary respect for the principle of the best interest of the child, taking childcare quality into consideration and allowing a real freedom for families with regard to their interest in childcare services" (MPSV 2009). OECD analyses also underline the significance of measures providing public day care for children. D'Addio and D'Ercole (2005:59) points out a positive effect of the support for day care for small children as a tool of family policy, however, only if this care meets as fully as possible all the basic requirements. It should be both financially and spatially accessible, and organised in a way to meet (employed) parents' needs and provide services of desirable quality.

Day care for small children has a long-term tradition in the Czech Republic: the first kindergarten was established under the education law in 1869 and the first nurseries were established in 1883. However, the facilities in question did not always meet all the above-mentioned criteria. Though prior to 1989 the day-care system ensured financial and spatial accessibility of such facilities, their quality differed and frequently was a subject to criticism. Nevertheless, regulations were established and legally confirmed, ensuring hygienic conditions and the fulfilment of formative and educational functions (for instance, in education law, in legal standards of the Ministry of Health Care for nurseries, in the law on pedagogical staff, etc.). In this respect, a relatively high standard was established and has been maintained ever since in public day-care facilities. The conditions of their financing and thus their accessibility have, however, changed. Financing now varies considerably depending on regional and local conditions and by type of service, which also implies variation by the age of eligible children. For the public sector it holds generally that the services of kindergartens for children aged 3–6 years are financially and spatially accessible for the vast majority of families (see [Table II](#) in the annex). However, spatial accessibility has deteriorated for day-care facilities for children under the age of three ([Table I](#) in the annex). Care for small children in nurseries has also become more expensive for families. In some regions, demand for kindergartens has also become increasingly difficult to meet. Reasons for that are multiple, as it will be shown in detail later on.

1 See European Commission (2007a), European Council (2002) and European Commission (2007b).



One of the fundamental changes that have occurred in the day-care system since the early 1990s is the introduction of private and church facilities (see [Table II](#) in the annex). This has brought new aspects in the quality of services and also cushioned the impact of the decline in public facilities on the accessibility of day-care services. However, the share of these facilities is not large enough and they are mostly located in cities. Nevertheless, their establishment has contributed to an increase of flexibility in the supply of day-care services. In relation to the demand, this has been, however, still insufficient.

Presently, the situation in the Czech Republic is characterised by a growing discrepancy between demand and supply of day-care services for pre-school children. There are several reasons for this discrepancy, among the major ones we can mention the following:

- Changing demographic behaviour towards an increase in the birth rate after the year 2000 (however, recent figures for 2009 imply a possible slackening of the rate or even a stagnation);
- Quantitative and organisational changes in the kindergarten system through which municipalities addressed the decline in the birth rate in previous years;
- Transfer of the function of establishing nurseries from the state to municipalities without any entitlement for financial assistance from the central government, which resulted in increased fees and reduced demand for nurseries;
- Different levels of public support for facilities for children under the age of three versus facilities for children between three and six years of age;
- Insufficient offer of alternative forms of day care;
- Insufficient motivation of employers to establish day-care facilities and absence of state support for this motivation, including amending legislative requirements;
- Lack of experience and tradition in an innovative search for one's own alternative forms of care at the community level;
- Legislative barriers to developing alternative forms of care at the community level;
- Limited financial (thus also spatial) accessibility of private day-care facilities under the current (not only) legislative conditions;
- Lack of tradition in providing home-based individual care and the high price of such services.

Analyses of the statistical documentation and selected studies show that the current situation in the provision of day care for children is not wholly unsatisfactory, but there are numerous deficiencies in the system. There are large variations in accessibility and possibilities to reconcile family and professional roles by region and social status. The limited accessibility of such facilities in certain locations and for certain social and professional groups is reflected in the employment rate of mothers with small children. The limited flexibility and range of services offered by kindergartens reduce parents' chances to find facilities suited to their specific care needs.

In terms of the percentage of children in specific age-groups participating in pre-school education, the situation has been improving ([Table 1](#)). In international comparison, however, the Czech Republic occupies an ambiguous position. For three-year-old children, the Czech Republic is lagging behind the EU average, while for four-year-old children, it occupies roughly a middle position (see [Table 2](#); compare also OECD 2007).

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Child's age	1996/97	2000/01	2004/05	2008/09	Increase in percentage points (1996–2008)
Under 3 years	12.2	21.3	26.4	24.8	12.6
3 years old	55.7	71.4	77.1	76.5	20.8
4 years old	81.3	93.0	93.4	89.4	8.1
5 years old	90.2	97.4	94.1	92.8	2.6
6 years old*	18.4	24.3	22.4	21.0	4.0**
Over 6 years	-	-	-	0.5	

\* In the school years 1996/97–2004/05 children over 5 years of age

\*\* Children above 5 years of age in 1996–2004. Compulsory school age is 6 years in the Czech Republic.

**Table 1. Growth in the share of children in kindergartens by age group (shares in %)**

Source: ÚIV data

Child's age	Country									
	PL	SK	CZ	HU	AT	UK	DE	SE	FR	EU27
3 years	33.1	62.0	62.4	72.8	50.3	78.5	84.4	96.5	98.8	75.3
4 years	44.4	74.1	87.8	92.4	84.6	90.7	94.2	100.0	100.0	88.6

**Table 2. Share of children in pre-school education by age in selected countries, 2007, %**

Source: Eurostat, Education statistics, UOE data collection (educ\_ipart, educ\_ipart\_s). Quoted from: Education in Europe – Key statistics 2007 – Data in Focus 37/2009, Eurostat

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## MAIN FACTORS DETERMINING DEMAND FOR DAY-CARE FACILITIES

Key determinants of demand include the demographic structure of society and the employment level of women and of mothers of pre-school children, also considering regional variation in these factors. However, the employment rate of mothers with small children is also affected by the supply of childcare outside the family.

The demographic behaviour and age structure of the Czech population has gone through numerous dramatic changes in the past twenty years. A steep fall of birth-rate levels since the mid 1990s resulted in a reduced size of the youngest age category. The size of the group aged 0-6 years shrank from 879,779 in 1990 to 731,876 by 2008 (in 2002 their number amounted to a mere 630,333). Between 1990 and 1999, the total fertility rate dropped from 1.89 to 1.13, with a subsequent growth to 1.50 by 2008.

The share of children at the age of 0-14 dropped from 21.5% in 1990 to 14.1% of the total population by 2008. Since this drop followed a gradual decrease in the number of children in the 1980s, many municipalities responded by shutting down day-care facilities for pre-school children, especially for children aged below three (*Kuchařová and Svobodová 2006*). A gradual increase in the birth rate after 2000 has resulted in the current situation where some municipalities and regions deal with a problem of insufficient institutional provision of care for the youngest generation. In the past five years, the number of children has been growing so far mainly at the nursery age (Table 3), however, the growth has started shifting into the higher age cohorts. However, the declining trend in the number of nurseries and places has not changed. Other forms of day care for the very small children have not developed in terms of quantity to such a degree that they could take the growing number of children. There is some anecdotal evidence that an increasing share of mothers are forced to give up their professional ambitions or use various forms of informal care, particularly within the family. An increase in the discrepancy between the demand and supply of day care can also be anticipated with regard to mothers with children above three years of age compared to the smaller ones in performing work and parental roles in parallel.

year	Child's age					
	0–2 years	3–5 years	6–10 years	0–10 years	11–14 years	0–14 years
1993	368 825	382 919	660 073	1 411 817	597 935	2 009 752
2002	273 229	286 278	533 079	1 073 552	516 214	1 589 766
2007	323 563	267 244	451 634	1 061 475	415 448	1 476 923
2008	341 293	296 684	456 062	1 094 039	385 968	1 480 007

**Table 3. Changes in the number of children by age group in 1993–2008**

Source: Age structure of population in the Czech Republic in 2002, ČSÚ (Czech Statistical Office) 2003.

Age structure of population in 2007, ČSÚ 2008.

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Aggregate statistics on employment do not allow an adequate evaluation of the context of labour market conditions and the fulfilment of parental roles. One cannot read directly from them what chances a person has on the labour market with regard to characteristics of his/her family background. However, from findings concerning specific unemployment levels, use of flexible work schedules and other indicators, links between the public sphere of work and the private sphere of family can be found. Gender gaps are among the most revealing indicators. Compared to men, the employment rate of women is lower while their share among part-time employees is considerably higher at the time of their highest fertility. Data about these differences suggest that family duties limit women in their participation in the labour market significantly more than men. These facts support the appeal voiced by some activists of non-government organisations and some experts and politicians to expand day-care services for very small children, which would release their mothers from family obligations (fathers experience this problem only exceptionally).

The employment rate of women at 25-34 years of age, when most women have a child in the infant to pre-school age, amounts to 60-65% (Table 4), which is about 20% points lower than for older women. Over 90% of employed women work full-time, significantly more than in most European countries. In the past twenty years, the economic activity of mothers with small children has tended to decline. In the case of mothers at the age of 20-44 with children up to 4 years of age, the decline between 1993 and 2007 went from 48% to 28%, while for childless mothers<sup>2</sup> of the same age the decline was from 88% to 84% (ČSÚ 2008). This is a consequence of both an extension of parental leave and a secular decline in the labour supply of mothers with very small children, but also of a decline in the supply of day-care services. At the same time, the unemployment rate of these mothers has been growing. This proves that their interest in employment was not sufficiently satisfied, especially at their return from parental leave. Age-specific unemployment rates show that the biggest differences in the unemployment rate by gender are precisely at the age when women are taking care of very small children (Table 4).<sup>3</sup> The main reasons for the unsuccessful job search by small children's mothers may include both the childcare system and employers' attitudes (lack of interest in employing these women or unwillingness to create working conditions taking into account employees' family duties, such as day-care facilities at the firm).

Amendments to the conditions of entitlement to parental allowances and parental leave implemented after 2004 aimed to support various possibilities for reconciling family and work by allowing part-time work for women, while the same entitlements are maintained. The use of the possibilities given by these amendments turned out to be lower than expected. The reasons behind include the limited supply of day-care facilities and a low interest of employees as well as employers in part-time work. In 2007, 24% of employed mothers with children younger than 4 years worked part-time, while for mothers of children at the immediate pre-school age this percentage was even higher compared to the average, though declining among mothers with older children (ČSÚ 2008). In this respect, the Czech Republic differs from most EU countries. This applies not only to the percentage of women working part-time of all the employed Czech women, but also to the percentage of part-time work by Czech mothers with small children. Even the latter is lower than the almost one-third average share of part-time jobs among all employed women in the EU. The percentage of mothers with small children working part time has slightly increased in recent years, whereas for the other women (also slightly) decreased (LFS data, ČSÚ 2008). Czech women continue working mostly full-time even when caring for very small children. Therefore, for their children they need especially the typical all-day care in nurseries and kindergartens. At the same time, their preferences indicate a reduction of (daily) work load to the benefit of more time and energy for childcare, which could be resolved by using alternative forms of care and working part-time.

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2 Mothers that do not have a child aged 0-4.

3 The unemployment rate of mothers (20-44 years of age) with children at the age of 0-4 years grew from 10.0% in 1993 to 11.9% by 2007 compared to the women of the same age but childless or with older children –the growth in their case was from 4.7% in 1993 to 6.9%.

	Unemployment rate	Participation rate	Employment rate	Part-time workers	Flexible w.hours
Women 20–44 with children aged 0–4	11.9	28.4	25.0	24.0	-
Women 20–44 with no child aged 0–4	6.9	83.8	78.0	5.8	-
Women 25–34	6.7–8.8	65.9–68.4	60–65	-	20.2*
Women 40–49	5.0–5.5	90.7–92.1	85.7–87.3	-	17.3**
Women total	6.7	49.8	46.4	8.5	18.4
Men total	4.2	68.3	65.5	2.3	23.4

Notes: \*age 24-29, \*\*age 45-59

**Table 4. Women's labour market position and working conditions in 2007**

Sources: *Life of women and men. CSO 2007. Focus on women and men. Prague, CSO 2008*

## SUBJECTIVE ASPECTS OF DEMAND FOR DAY-CARE FACILITIES

The subjective aspects of demand for day-care facilities are primarily determined by parents' preferences regarding values related to family and work and to the means of their reconciliation. They are connected also to preferences regarding optimal care for children. Institutional care or care provided by a non-family member come into view when the family cannot care for the children because the parents work and there is no assistance from other members of the family, or because for some reason they refuse such forms of care.

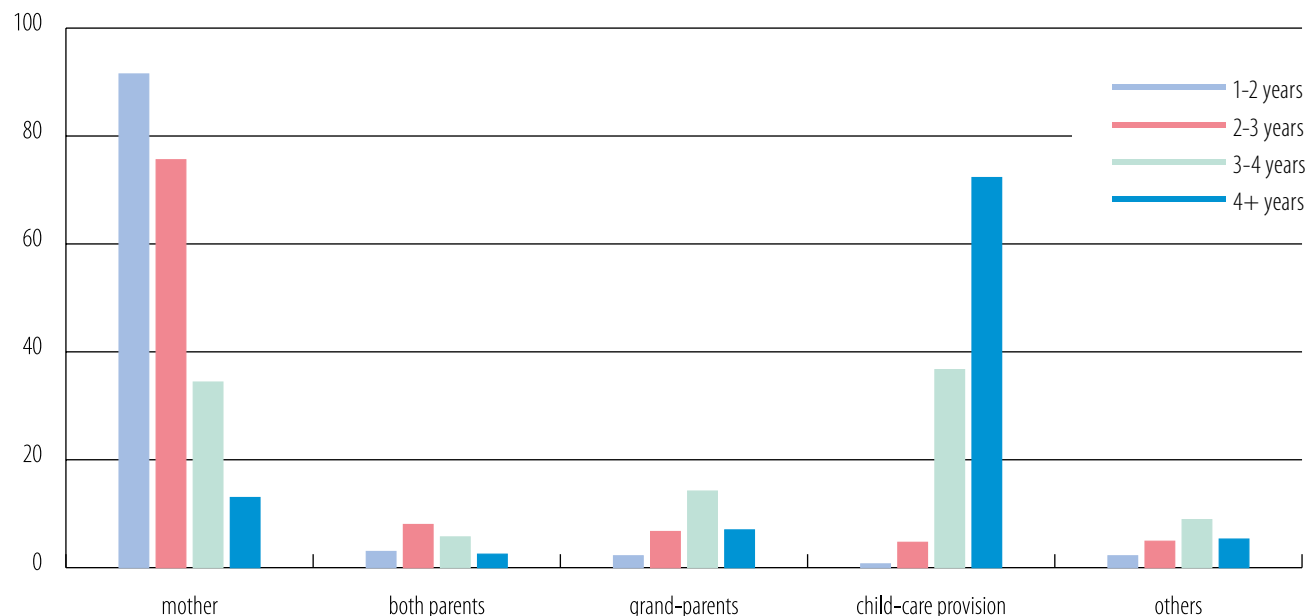
As far as the inclination of values in terms of family and professional aspirations, interest in reconciling both spheres has prevailed in the Czech population. However, there are differences conditioned in particular by the family status and the stage of family cycle (presence and age of children in the family) and by education and gender. The role of the life-cycle stage was examined in 2006 in the research "RZV06." According to its results more than four fifth of mothers with pre-school children prefer family to professional life, whereas one sixth of women (rather the more educated ones) prefer an equal intensity devoted to both spheres even during this life-cycle stage (in the case of fathers the two corresponding shares are roughly one third). Among parents of school children, preferences change, so that three in four of mothers prefer family and two in ten prefer the reconciliation of both spheres (for fathers of school children both opinions are held by about one in three of them). Only a minor shift in opinion occurs when adult children leave the family. Despite women's considerable professional aspirations, they prefer to take care for their children by themselves at the time before their children start going to school (at varying intensity, Figure 1). Complementarily, institutional day-care in nurseries and kindergartens is considered best for children at the age of 2-3 by 5% of women, for children at the age of 3-4 by 35% of women and for older children by 67% of women (for children under two years of age these preferences are negligible).<sup>4</sup>

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4 The data in Figure 1 show an average based on two surveys – of mothers from two-parent and from single-parent families whose opinions practically did not differ. The category "others" includes on the one hand various forms of family care (except for the mother's care), which prevail, and on the other hand, alternative forms of non-family care which were preferred only marginally. The latter ones are of peripheral interest also due to their low tradition in the Czech Republic.



**Figure 1. Preferred forms of caring for children by parents of small children**

Source: RZV06

Like the overall preferences, opinions on the difficulty to reconcile family and work are also differentiated. This also holds for opinions on the role of specific measures aiming to balance the relation of these spheres. Within the wide spectrum of family-policy measures, most emphasis is generally put on children's day-care facilities. In the preference charts, however, these are preceded by material support, mainly via financial assistance (maternity benefits, parental allowances, etc.), i.e. via support for the home-based care for small children. Also in terms of work-life balance, the parents of very small children ascribe most importance to the financial compensation of lost earnings during maternity and parental leave (Höhne 2008: 26). Among the preferred measures to facilitate the reconciliation of family and work (based on the research RZV06), the accessibility of day-care facilities occupies a middle position. A greater emphasis is put on facilities for children between three and six years of age. To briefly summarise results of the survey among parents of children at different age (RZV06), one may say that parents' demand for day-care facilities is relatively low if they have children under two years of age,<sup>5</sup> but it grows significantly when the children reach three<sup>6</sup> and in particular four years of age.<sup>7</sup>

In sporadic public opinion polls that focus on family policy, respondents attach a rather greater importance to facilities providing institutional care compared to the aforementioned selective sociological researches. Besides differences in the sampling method,<sup>8</sup> public opinion polls also use simpler questions.<sup>9</sup> The prevailing public opinion appears to be that the state should guarantee the availability of kindergartens and nurseries, including financial accessibility. However, actual demand for these services is far from being so even. Demand for alternative forms of care is growing in parallel, caused by two sets of reasons. One of these concern the limitations on using traditional forms of day care, especially the accessibility and conditions of preserving entitlement to the parent's allowance while using services of nurseries and kindergartens (entitlement is condi-

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5 As the preferred form of care it is mentioned by about 4-5 % of parents of small children (depending on the family type) compared to more than 86% of parents preferring care in the nuclear family and compared to 5% of parents preferring the care by grandparents and the extended family as such.

6 Here it is preferred by about one third of parents of small children, whereas care in the nuclear family by about one half of them and grandparents' care by one tenth.

7 No sooner than at this age category, does the preference of the institutional care clearly prevail, declared by 67% parents of small children, unlike 18-21% (depending on the family type) supporting the care by the nuclear family and 7% preferring grandparental care.

8 Public opinion is often examined via questionnaires, where the representativeness of the sample is not ensured and answers are often given only by those who have a pronounced opinion or problems with the topic in question.

9 Whereas e.g. in researches focusing on work-family harmonization (e.g. HRZ05) we ask which forms of childcare people prefer, how much they use it actually, what improvement of the day-care services they wish, this public opinion poll included a general question whether it should be a problem to get a place for a child in a kindergarten, etc. (e.g. the questionnaire survey carried out by the agency DEMA for Aperio included a question "Are there any problems with the supply of services for the family /e.g. regarding baby-sitting and other services /?" with potential answers "Yes – No".

tional on the scope of attendance in these facilities). The other set of reasons are related to the growing work flexibility and dynamics of everyday life. People respond, among others, by differentiating their requirements on the quality and scope of care (e.g. demand well-situated social classes for formative and development activities compared to the needs of the socially disadvantaged for whom these facilities have a predominantly social function).

In public opinion polls on pre-school day care, high costs are often criticised (Aperio 2008), mostly concerning the prices of private agencies for provision of care and home-based care services but also the fact that the state does not support these services. When asked about suggestions for the improvement of child-care services, respondents mainly refer to their availability and fees, but some also mention the need for facilities in firms or close to the work place.

The quality of kindergarten services is not often monitored. One of the exceptions is a survey HRZ05, which focused on parents as recipients of services by kindergartens and other facilities. This survey shows that the quality of care and activities satisfied almost all the families (97%), and completely satisfied more than half of them. Also the possible duration of stay during the day in the kindergarten was convenient for most families (91%). Dissatisfied were predominantly citizens from municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants. The time for opening and closing the facility was not convenient only for 10% of parents. Based on the research ZDPD08, an estimated one half of nurseries have adjusted their opening hours upon parents' request in recent years. In the case of kindergartens, about one quarter of them encountered parents' dissatisfaction in this regard, but most of them only exceptionally. Despite that, two fifths of the criticised facilities fulfilled the parents' request. All in all, nursery and kindergarten staff appear to be receptive to parents' requirements.

Parents' needs and requirements regarding pre-school day-care services relate to three spheres:

- Quality of services + their spatial accessibility;
- Structure and diversification of forms of services supplied;
- Quality of services;
- Financial accessibility.

## FINANCING DAY-CARE FACILITIES AND THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF FAMILIES USING THESE FACILITIES

One of the key associations with demand for day-care services consists in their financial requirements. In a study by the Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ) on pre-school education development<sup>10</sup> it is stated that "the requested and continuously growing co-financing by parents does not affect their interest in placing their child in the kindergarten". This is a "statistical" view based on the development in the number of children in kindergartens and the number of rejected applications for kindergarten attendance. However, this situation has changed since.

The financial burden experienced by families with small children when using nurseries and/or kindergartens is primarily determined by the system of financing these institutions. Their income consists of subsidies from the state budget (minimal or zero except for kindergartens), money from the municipal budgets (limited by other municipal expenses), subsidies from various other entities and contributions paid by parents. Kindergartens (as the only day-care facility for children at the pre-school age) are eligible for funding from the state budget via the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT in Czech) for educational purposes. Under the education law, funding is not dependent on the type of the establishing authority, but conditional on incorporation in the School Register and thus on the fulfilment of statutory requirements for the establishment and activities of kindergartens. In the past twenty years, the running costs of kindergartens covered by budget of the Ministry

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10 Long-term development of the pre-school education in the Czech Republic. Prague, ČSÚ. 2008.

<http://www.czso.cz/csu/2008edicniplan.nsf/p/3310-08>



of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) (as a percentage of total expenditures) have been gradually decreasing in relative terms and investment costs were entirely shifted to municipalities. The state does not contribute to nurseries at all and their existence depends fully on the possibilities of each municipality.

The structure of financing institutional day-care facilities together with the growing costs for their operation has been reflected in the growing demand for financial support from parents. Parents view their (potential) costs in terms of how the family budget is affected e.g. by the fact that a mother finishes the parental leave and starts working. Her expected income is compared with the costs of commuting to work and for childcare, the reduction or loss of social benefits and also the change in the tax relief. According to parents' views in 2005 in the research HRZ05, they spent on the kindergarten on average CZK 690 per one child per month, including basic fees, meals and other services. According to a survey of kindergarten staff in 2008 (ZDPD08), the average kindergarten fee was CZK 257 and average fees for meals per child, if the child was attending the kindergarten for 20 days in a month, amounted to CZK 520. That means a hypothetical cost per child amounted to CZK 780 on average.<sup>11</sup> So, if in 2008 a woman started to work for the minimum wage (CZK 8,000 gross per month), roughly one tenth of the gross wage would have been paid for the kindergarten. However, this is an entirely non-standard, marginal case. The actual percentage of kindergarten costs in the family budget depends, as it has been mentioned above, on the earned income of (both) parents and social as well as other incomes. If a child lived with both parents earning the average wage, the share of kindergarten fees would amount to less than 2% of the gross earned incomes of the parents (ČSÚ 2009a). In relation to the average net income of families with children, in low income families such fees would amount to 8% of their net income (ČSÚ 2009b). However, such families are often exempt from the fee.<sup>12</sup> In an average family with two adults and one dependant child the fee of CZK 780 made up, by estimate, about 2% of the net family income (average income of households categorized by ČSÚ 2009b). Similar results were derived from a survey of the costs of children's education and nourishment in 2003.<sup>13</sup> The total fees for kindergartens are, however, differentiated by a range of criteria, especially by the establishing authority, services supplied and location (e.g. differences between big cities and rural municipalities). In the case of the highest fee detected in the survey ZDPD08 (CZK 800 for the kindergarten fee plus CZK 520 for meals) the average family of two adults and one child would spend monthly about 4% of the net monthly income for the kindergarten (however, a fee above CZK 600 per month is charged by only 1% of kindergartens).

In summary of the above findings, as far as kindergartens are concerned, their financial accessibility does not seem to be a problem for most Czech families with small children. From this point of view, e.g. a flat exemption of children in the last pre-school year from fees, introduced in 2006, does not seem justified, neither did it prove in terms of an increase in the number of children from socially weak families, while it caused some difficulties in the budget of kindergartens.

The fees for nurseries are significantly higher since nurseries are not entitled to receive support from the state budget. Municipalities subsidize from their budgets nurseries in order to reduce the financial burden of parents, also taking into account the social situation of the given family. Nevertheless, payments by parents for their children in nurseries cover a larger part of costs. These are considerably high because of statutory hygienic and other requirements. Recently, this has become one of the reasons of a decreasing interest in nurseries. The economic disadvantage of using nursery services for many Czech families contributed (besides their being expensive for small municipalities) to the decline in their number.

The situation is entirely different in the case of facilities taking care of pre-school children established by other than state or municipal entities. The variability of such facilities is greater than the forms which have been established so far by municipalities and regions, therefore, the financial costs of the various types of services differ markedly. Kindergartens which are not educational legal entities (they are not established by the state, region or municipality) may take the form of a foundation or

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11 Total expenditure for the care in pre-school facilities consists in principle of three elements: payment for the stay (when determining the amount of payment the headmaster is limited by 50 % of the actual average non-investment costs per month per child in the previous calendar year), a fee for meals and fees for educational services (set by the facility).

12 Decree of the Ministry of Education defines cases of a full or partial exemption from fees, the level of which is determined by the headmaster of the given school. In case of nurseries, the level of fees is determined by the municipality which also fully decides on the exemption from fees for socially weak families.

13 Costs of upbringing and nourishment of children in 2003. Prague, ČSÚ 2004. Here, our own calculations from the survey database.

a non-profit or for-profit entity (these forms follow different legal regulations). Private kindergartens also receive state subsidies for educational activities, however, they may request a higher kindergarten fee from parents. Church facilities are in a similar situation, however, churches do not usually charge a fee.

Services rendered under company law apply basically contractual prices. Parents pay not only the total costs for the service itself but also (though only a minimal) profit without which the entity providing the service could not exist. Therefore, prices here are significantly higher compared to public kindergartens and also nurseries. For individual care by a babysitter, the fee amounts to about 130-150 CZK per hour.

To evaluate the situation in the Czech Republic in international comparison we can mention a finding of an OECD study (Immervoll et al 2005:4), which compares the costs of day-care in relation to the family budget taking the role of social benefits and tax relief into consideration. The study highlights the relatively high costs of childcare. In some countries these costs may make up over 20% of the family budget in a family with two children below school age, even when social benefits are included in incomes. Based on this study, there are many countries where fees are high especially in facilities for children under the age of three. Some countries help families in financing day-care facilities by supporting both (either) these facilities and (or) families directly. Efficient measures often focus on individuals for whom inaccessibility of childcare services due to financial reasons has the most serious impact on securing children's needs – e.g. lone mothers who are subsequently unemployed, or partners from complete families who have a low income. Both forms are being applied in the Czech Republic, albeit not systematically enough.

International practice points out another important aspect which is (for the time being) not seen as a hot issue in the Czech Republic but which must be kept in mind as it is often mentioned by the critics of the ill-designed support for alternative forms of day-care. This concerns the danger of providing support for day-care facilities that will undermine quality requirements on care. Financial accessibility must not be supported to the detriment of quality, especially in vulnerable areas, e.g. where socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In this context, the emphasis in the Czech Republic is placed on a legal guarantee of quality – nurseries and kindergartens established by municipalities and regional authorities. Support is given to the attempt to maintain standards of minimum quality also in other sectors. This, however, does not rule out the necessity to sensibly moderate current standards for aforementioned traditional types of institutions as a precondition for a higher variability of day-care services.

## INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONDITIONS FOR INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF DAY-CARE SERVICES

The Czech Republic has a long-term tradition of institutional day-care for pre-school children starting from their early years.<sup>14</sup> The transformation of social and economic conditions initiated in the 1990s together with the subsequent changes of demographic behaviour caused a change in the supply of institutional care, which was rather dramatic especially for children under the age of three. At the same time, within a gradually developing civil society a room has been opened for alternative forms of care for children during the time when parents or the extended family are unable to ensure it.

Since the early 1990s the need and function of day-care facilities have been gradually changing. Rather idealised views of the development of economic conditions in the early 1990s included an assumption that in better-off families the women would prefer to stay home longer with their children after birth. A simultaneously anticipated growth of unemployment was also one of the inspirations for legalising a longer and gradually extended parental leave. In reality, families responded by a de-

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14 See Structures of educational systems, vocational training and education of adults in Europe. Czech Republic. Prague, ÚIV 2008.

creased interest in the institutional care for the very small children, i.e. less than 2–3 years of age (Kuchařová and Svobodová 2006). A decline in demand for day-care facilities for the very small children was accompanied by strengthening self-governing roles of local municipalities and regional authorities and by reducing the central governance in general, especially in the field of education and health care, where most of the day-care facilities pertain to. This process meant a reduction and change of forms of the state financial support for these facilities, thus also the aforementioned growing costs of it paid by parents. Consequences of those on demand have also been mentioned above. Establishing authorities were often forced to shut down the facility due to economic pressure.

In terms of establishers' powers, the decisive role in the present system is played by municipalities that are establishers of the prevailing number of nurseries and kindergartens. Whereas from the financial point of view, the care for children under the age of three lies fully on municipalities, kindergartens are supported in their educational functions (vital for them) by the state.

The institutional framework of day-care services in its essentials has been affected by the fact that it was created within several government departments. In particular, it is under the competence of education and health care departments, in a lesser degree under the competence of labour and social affairs, legal standards produced by the ministries of finance and interior also play their role (they determine rules for the functioning of local and regional governments). In the legislative and organizational requirements for establishing and operating particular types of day-care facilities, demands of several ministries meet which need not and often are not in harmony. This fact does not contribute to the entire day-care system to be properly integrated in order to meet various demands for these services. What kind of standards and qualitative requirements must be fulfilled by the facility relates to the fact what kinds of functions have been defined for the particular type of facility. Most often, it is a certain relation between the all-embracing social function (securing children at the time their parents are at work) and the educational function (particularly for children above the age of three). The respective major ministries should be those responsible for social affairs and education.

However, as a consequence of the traditional understanding of nurseries, these facilities come under the scope of the Ministry of Health Care in spite of the fact that they take care for healthy children only. It is based on the ground that traditionally they were viewed as facilities for medical and preventive care; that is why nurses took care for the children there, though the legislation also allows for the pedagogical qualification for the pre-school education. Adding the fact that the Ministry of Health Care does not support nurseries financially, this tie-up with this ministry is at least controversial. Until October 1991 nurseries were among facilities that fell under the authority of the Ministry of Education together with kindergartens, facilities joining both a nursery and a kindergarten and "children homes" (facilities taking care for children at the age of two to six years). The situation has changed after the law on pre-school and school facilities and subsequently the education law came into force, consistently putting only kindergartens and facilities providing higher levels of education into the category of school facilities. Nurseries have been considered purely health-care facilities since the early nineties of last century (Šamanová 2007). Nowadays, children under the age of three are also looked after, apart from nurseries, by other facilities that do not come under the authority of the Ministry of Health Care. Also these facilities must meet legal standards, regarding hygiene and staff qualification, issued by this department. However, care-givers operating under the trade law are not subject to entirely identical requirements.

Whereas the tie-up of nurseries with the health-care department is controversial, the fact that all the day-care facilities are more or less of a social nature, has not been taken into consideration in the contribution of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (in Czech MPSV) in shaping the system of day-care services. However, this ministry is responsible for family policy,

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including a support for functioning family, which day-care facilities are part of. At present, MPSV focuses on supporting the alternative forms of the day-care for children. Specific draft measures, however, face criticism motivated both politically and professionally.

The division among departments has a certain justification in diversification of demands for day-care services as well as of their forms. However, on the other hand, it causes, among others, a lack of clarity in requirements for quality and scope of services and inequality of financial support for the various facilities. The majority of all educational activities are supported from the state budget (MSMT), which turn against nurseries, compared to kindergartens, which are determined to have different functions. At the same time, attendance of nurseries is not supported from the central level (respective ministry) even in the event when it carries out a social function (e.g. placement of children of lonely mothers or children from the socially or culturally underdeveloped environment). Social aspects are beyond the powers of the Ministry of Health Care (in Czech MZ), whereas the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs does not have services by nurseries within their competence. The overall institutional and legislative terms and the structure of day-care services do not sufficiently reflect changes in the scope and structure of demand. A discrepancy is thus arising among various aspects of the care and approaches of the entities involved. Disharmony can be found e.g. among preferences of parents of small children, territorial accessibility of various forms of services, their financial accessibility for specific social groups, abilities of public authorities to ensure the services which are within their power, normative environment for establishing a day-care facility by commercial and non-profit entities. Parents' requirements should be the decisive standard for shaping the system of the day-care for children.

If, based on this brief summary, we want to make a general evaluation of the institutional provision of day-care services; the biggest reserves are confirmed to be in the care for children under the age of three. Since these are children who need an individualized care with regard to their physical and mental development, its alternative forms have the largest room especially here. However, in this field, there is the highest tension between providing the necessary quality and accessibility for all the interested parties. The range of entities that may theoretically take part in the day-care for pre-school children is wide enough. Each of the existing or potential types of these entities has, however, some limitations. Let's have a short look at institutional barriers for extension of the supply of day-care services.

- Barriers in terms of including a sufficient spectrum of entities establishing and providing day-care services for children may consist for particular entities in these areas:
  - *Municipalities*<sup>15</sup>: Their role is essential, indispensable and broad, which applies to all types of municipalities. Their liability to legal regulations on municipalities and responsibility within the range of agendas in the local self-government does not allow them to respond flexibly to the changing demand. Some mandatory obligations are met with difficulty especially by the smallest municipalities, therefore they utilise possibilities for cooperation with other municipalities in such areas where they are obliged to secure the services (e.g. kindergarten attendance for children 5-6 years old), or they give up services (nurseries).
  - *Private natural persons*: They run against the fact they are relatively new entities, still lacking a firm position and sufficient trust of the public. It is often difficult for them to meet requirements placed by the current legislative standards on hygiene.
  - *Private legal persons*: The same as to the private natural persons applies to them, but it is easier for them to handle legal demands.
  - *Non-government non-profit organizations*: With regard to their dependence on the grants and sponsor-based

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15 Regional authorities and the state are not mentioned here, as their role as establishers is very specific, and in a quantitative sense rather marginal. Also, if they operate as establishers, they do not face serious barriers.

financing, their existence is rather uncertain and they often cannot offer (provide) services regularly and put equal qualification demands on their staff as it is the case in nurseries and kindergartens. Their role and preference, however, consist in specific services, in particular in provision of the care in informal environment and in short-term child minding, when they are able to provide the required quality.

- *Business entities – companies and organizations:* Their interest in providing child-minding services depends on the situation on the labour market – if they are involved in maintaining the stable and high-qualified staff even at the expense of supposing their family duties. It also depends on prosperity of companies, which may be uncertain in small companies, so that under the existing legislative terms big companies, almost solely, can be considered for establishing “company kindergartens”. For the time being, company kindergartens are an insufficiently frequented and also still not well-considered alternative for the other kindergartens and other forms of childcare. Legal context for their establishment as well as requirements for qualitative indicators of their operation have not been sufficiently analysed yet. So far unclear conditions do not awaken companies’ interest to get involved here.
- Barriers to a larger supply of services consisting in the (in)sufficient number of the staff and their necessary qualification: Particularly, they relate to the private sector, especially if services are provided with a short-term and irregular attendance for a lower number of children. Such organizations have to require the same qualification as kindergartens, although they fulfil different roles. The open question is what the “minimal necessary” qualification is in terms of its level and professional orientation. High requirements which are valid and do not cause problems in institutional facilities, established by municipalities, seem to be counter-productive at the search for alternative forms of care. On the contrary, “state” institutions face problems concerning rather tolerant standards for the number of children per teacher/educator.
- Barriers to a larger supply of services consisting in (in)sufficient funding: The crucial problem is seen in the decrease of the state’s share in the day-care funding. In terms of non-investment costs, especially the exemption of the five years old children from fees caused problems for municipalities. The problem of a lack of funds is more complicated in small municipalities than in bigger ones.

One of the key issues of accessibility of day-care facilities is its legal guarantee. It is fully provided only for children at the age of five. The municipality is obliged to provide a child, who has a permanent residence in the locality, with a place in the kindergarten one year before the start of the compulsory school attendance<sup>16</sup> (education law).

The main topics of legislative standards, defining the scope of activities in day-care facilities for pre-school children, include their establishment, funding, organization of activities, hygienic requirements, safety and qualification requirements on professional staff working in the facility. Because of diversification of forms of the day-care for small children, the legislative framework gets complicated and the spectrum of legal standards that are applied here becomes broader. It would be useful to review adequacy of certain legislative standards with regard to each single type of services, their functions and scope of effect. Possibilities for more flexible forms to provide high-quality services need to be considered, incl. level of responsibility of parents themselves (their main interest is to put their children in a trustworthy care).

## SUPPLY AND DEMAND: USE OF DAY-CARE SERVICES IN SELECTED SURVEYS AND STATISTICS

No relevant representative aggregate data exist for an evaluation of the actual situation in the supply and use of day-care services. In principle, there are two types of data available – statistics on the attendance in particular types of facilities, and

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16 Structures of educational systems, vocational training and education of adults in Europe. Czech Republic. Prague, ÚIV 2008, p. 16

selective surveys. The relation of supply and demand for day-care facilities and their specific forms is strongly affected by the level of correspondence between the preferred forms of the child-care and the actually utilised services. Some findings of the Czech surveys on this correspondence have been mentioned above.

As preferences of Czech parents showed in the research HRZ05 and RZV06, in the case of the very small children the lack of interest in collective facility prevailed. It is caused to a considerable extent by the length of the paid parental leave. But apart from that, also by the value-based approach, e.g. a lack of trust in a collective facility or perception of babysitting utilisation as something that stigmatizes the mother as not being good enough, etc. The role is also played by complicated organizational and economic conditions for establishing collective facilities, which result, among others, from disintegration of Czech settlements (in terms of size). Despite a relatively limited interest of parents, many requirements on day care for children fewer than three years of age remain unfulfilled. As Table 5 shows, there exists a bilateral discrepancy between notions and the real situation. The table also points out that in sporadic cases the inaccessibility of the institutional care is replaced by utilisation of services of the home-based care. That happens because of the difference in price and also in accessibility between them. Reversely, the “level of replacement” is higher, i.e. the institutional care is often selected as the most accessible form despite the collision of this selection and preferences.

Child's age (years)	Parents preferred						All respondents **
	Hired person /paid babysitting at home			nurseries/kindergartens (part or whole of the day)*			
	Parents actually used			Parents actually used			
	Home-based babysitting	Nurseries /kinder-gartens*	All parents preferring home based	Home-based babysitting	Nurseries /kinder-gartens*	All parents preferring institutional	
under 1	0	0	2	0	1	4	1343
1-2	3	0	10	2	0	6	1340
2-3	7	1	23	1	16 (31%)	51	1335
3-4	13 (23%)	18 (32%)	57	3 (1%)	317 (69%)	462	1349
Above 4	12 (24%)	15 (30%)	50	5 (1%)	679 (76%)	892	1341

Notes: due to low numbers all the data cannot be meaningfully expressed in percentages.

\* including the private facilities providing similar services

\*\* Based on the number of respondents who answered the given question it is obvious that a marginal percentage of parents of very small children preferred day-care services, and also prevailing preference of the institutional care not earlier than at four years of child's age.

**Table 5. Parents' preferences for and use of childcare services by the child's age**

Source: data from the research RZV06. An aggregate file for all the surveys, in which the respective questions were asked. <sup>17</sup>

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17 The survey asked: “If you could make a choice and all options were accessible, what would you consider the best way to provide care for children before they start going to school?” and What was “... the actual way you provided (are providing) childcare at the time before they started (start) going to school?”. In the case of both questions, respondents chose from these answers: 1. By myself being on parental leave/staying home; 2. By my partner on parental leave/staying home; 3. By myself and my partner on parental leave / staying home, taking turns; 4. By grandparents/other relatives; 5. By mutual childminding with other parents /friends; 6. Hired person/paid home-based babysitting; 7. Nurseries / kindergarten (at least for part of the day).



In a recent international comparative analysis of the scope of day care for small children up to compulsory school age, (European Commission 2008), the Czech Republic was criticized as a country with a very low percentage of children attending institutional and other formally-regulated facilities. The comparison is complicated by a huge variability of the monitored facilities within the European context as well as in particular countries and also different traditions in providing childcare within the extended family. According to this international comparison, the Czech Republic is the last among the compared countries in the care for children under three years of age outside the family, which also corresponds to statistical data gathered in the Czech Republic. They also state it is about 2% of the children in the given age group. Does this very low number give evidence of a dramatic discrepancy between demand and supply? Based on what was mentioned above, not quite reliably.

Unfortunately, we must state that in the case of care for children under three years of age we totally lack reliable, i.e. statistical, data for measuring the factual relation of supply and demand. The only representative data we have at our disposal concern the number of children in nurseries. With regard to their marginal number and exclusive location in cities, they cannot be related to other data (e.g. to respective population age-groups). The situation gets also complicated due to a lack of quantitative information on the alternative care for children at such young age, which is also concentrated in cities anyway. Then compared to nurseries it plays an indispensable role. Rejected applications for the care for very small children are not known.

For the evaluation of accessibility of day-care services for children from three years of age to the start of school attendance more data are available, however, they do not always correspond one another. In the data by the Institute for Information on Education (Ústav pro informace ve vzdělávání, ÚIV) the total level of kindergarten accessibility is illustrated by percentage of children of all the 3-5 years olds attending them. In all the age groups (3, 4 and 5 years of child's age) a percentage of these children grew in 1996-2008, however, in a fluctuating way (Table 1). For three years old children it was also caused by the decline in the number of nurseries. The growth in the percentage of children placed in kindergartens in the respective age groups also in years, when the numbers of children in kindergartens as well as the numbers of kindergartens were declining, shows that the decline was caused predominantly by changes in birth-rate. It cannot be forgotten that at the same time there was a growing number of children with a delayed start of school attendance (and thus extended kindergarten attendance). The higher interest in kindergartens derived from that also affects, though not substantially, the relation of demand and supply. Data by ÚIV also show significant regional and local differences. If we stay with the indicator of kindergarten attendance for all the registered children (3-6 years old), then the percentage of attendants from the respective age cohort ranges between less than 60% (in five districts) and data exceeding 85% (in seven districts)<sup>18</sup>. Different regions also showed a different development in interest in kindergartens. E.g. the highest increase in the number of applications has been seen for children in Prague.<sup>19</sup> The entirely exceptional situation, when the number of applications for placing children in kindergartens decreases, is more often detected in municipalities with less than 5 thousand inhabitants. Under certain conditions, supply of kindergarten vacancies exceeds local demand.

Despite data related to the high and growing percentage of children attending kindergartens, the absolute number of unmet applications for attendance has been growing. Unlike at the beginning of this decade, this number is now about six times higher. Undoubtedly, it is an indicator of the growing interest in pre-school facilities, which is not fully met by supply. However, we do not know the impact of two factors. We do not know how many vacancies in kindergartens are not being utilised in the nationwide perspective and we do not know, what role in the growth is played by applications for placing three years old children, whose level of entrance is significantly lower than for older children (for five years old children municipalities are obliged to ensure the attendance; on the contrary, under special terms, even two years old children may gain

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18 More details in ÚIV statistics, until 2005 also in Kuchařová and Svobodová 2006.

19 Fast surveys 3/2008. Prague, ÚIV 2008, p. 6.



entrance<sup>20</sup>). The interest of mothers of three years old children is not insignificant and is caused, among others, by a lack of vacancies and significantly higher prices in other facilities and forms of care. However, it exceeds supply only in some localities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that there exist discrepancies between supply and demand for day care in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, in the global context, they do not seem to be dramatic. They are concentrated regionally, mostly in cities, where the discrepancy between insufficient public facilities and a high employment rate is high; in small municipalities it occurs in a lesser degree. The supply-demand discrepancy varies with the size and location of the municipality. In particular, it concerns the relation between the number and age structure of the population and facilities. The geographical position of the municipality has a potential affect on whether municipalities are located in the vicinity of a city or on the contrary, it is a municipality in a rural area with low population density. The degree of discrepancy also depends on the child's age: the gap between supply and demand is much larger for children aged two and three years, when some mothers want to return to the labour market, however, institutional conditions are not adjusted to their needs. The gap also varies according to type of facility and form of care. There is an imbalance between the share of institutional care and alternative forms provided by the private and non-profit sector, partly due to the fact that they are not systematically supported by the state.

ANNEX

	1990	1992	1996	1997	2000	2003	2005	2008
Number of facilities	1 043	381	151	101	65	60	54	48
Number of vacancies in nurseries	39 829	13 196	5 551	2 965	1 867	1 770	1671	1498
	Period							
Decrease in the number in %	-	1990-92	1992-96	1996-97	1997-00	2000-03	2003-05	2005-08
	-	- 64.9	- 57.9	- 46.6	- 37.0	- 5.2	- 5.6	- 10.4

Note: Data about facilities established by municipalities (or by the state). Since 2000 it has covered nurseries and micro-nurseries, including other children-care facilities. Until 1999 only data related to nurseries and micro-nurseries are included..

Table I. Number of nurseries and places between 1990 and 2008

Source: ÚZIS, Annual report on activities of health-care facilities. Status as at 31 December. of the respective year. Health care in the Czech Republic 2008 in statistical data.

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20 Compare e.g.: Structures of educational systems, vocational trainings and education of adults in Europe. Česká republika. Prague, ÚIV 2008.

	1989/90	1991/92	1995/96	1999/2000	2002/03	2005/06	2008/09
Public	7 328	6 906	6 338	5 816	5 697	4 741	4702
Private	-	61	121	69	80	72	82
Church	-	5	16	16	21	21	25
Total*	-	-	-	-	5 798	4 834	4 809
Of which standard kindergartens*	7 328	6 972	6 475	5 901	5 558	4 710	-
% of public kindergartens	100	99.1	97.9	98.6	98.3	98.1	97.8
Number of children	395 164	323 270	333 433	290 192	284 865	282 183	301 620
% of children in kindergartens among children aged 3-5 years	97.4	83.3	88.4	94.7	104.3	102.8	101.7
% of children in pre-school education among children aged 3-5 years	98.7	84.7	90.4	97.2	106.3	104.3	102.4
Change	-	1990-92	1992-96	1996-2000	2000-03	2003-06	2006-09
% change in the number of kindergartens	-	- 4.9	- 7.1	- 8.9	- 5.8	- 15.3**	- 0.5
% change in the number of children	-	81.8	103.1	87.0	98.2	99.1	106.9

\* Numbers are listed without special kindergartens and kindergartens for institutional and preventive education, because they have been included in the total number only since 2000/2001.

\*\* In 2004/05 workplaces are counted, in further years the whole kindergartens regardless the number of workplaces. Recently, the number of kindergartens has also been affected by their merging.

**Table II. Number of kindergartens between 1989 and 2008**

Source: Database of the Institute for Information on Education (ÚIV)

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## DATA SOURCES

- HRZ05: Life-work reconciliation (Harmonizace rodiny a zaměstnání), Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs 2005 (338 men and 881 women, respondents were labour force and parents on maternity or parental leave, with at least one child, age of the oldest child 1-10 years).
- RZV06: Family and employment (Rodina a zaměstnání) I-V, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs 2006 (series of 5 surveys devoted to selected types of families based on the family cycle, each of them having approx. 500 respondents).
- ZDPD08: Care for children in the pre-school and early school age, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs 2008 (survey among members of municipalities of all size and the staff from nurseries, kindergartens, after-school care centres and providers of alternative day care for children, combination of quantitative and qualitative surveys)
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This paper concerns Czech childcare policy, its latest developments and especially its future prospects. The last government had made some specific proposals in the area but since their fall, the future of Czech childcare policy is not easily predictable. This paper focuses on the electoral programmes of Czech parliamentary parties for the elections planned in 2010. The proposed measures in childcare policy are analysed in terms of policy motives and the division of care responsibilities.

## INTRODUCTION

Czech family policy has gone through a period of changes after the fall of communist totalitarianism. Within the paternalist regime before 1989, childcare was the main pillar of family policy enabling women to enter the labour market and contribute to the achievement of the goals set in the planned economy. Since The Velvet Revolution of 1989, when the communist system was overthrown, the highly defamilialised system<sup>1</sup> of childcare has changed in the reverse direction. This trend, referred to as refamilialisation (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006), meant a shifting of day care for children back to the families. Using Leitner's division of familialism<sup>2</sup>, the Czech system can be considered as implicitly familialistic (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006) because it does not provide institutional day care for children in the needed extent as it will be shown later.<sup>3</sup>

Such changes in family policy measures clearly have various consequences and are reflected in the gender discourse. First, a long duration of leave and long childcare benefits in combination with a lack of institutional childcare provision may cause that women pull out of the labour market for longer periods. This potentially leads to the erosion of human capital of such women, especially when maternity/parental leave is longer than a year (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Even after the return to the labour market women are exposed to difficulties in reconciling care and work. It has been shown that the younger the child is, the harder it is to harmonize these two life spheres for Czech women (Plasová and Válková, 2009). Second, globalizing economies lead to a higher demand for flexibility that may or may not contribute to the successful reconciliation depending on who enforces the flexibility. Both employers and employees may seek flexibility but this is not always compatible (Evans, 2001). It can be assumed that women in time-flexible jobs can harmonize childcare and work better. However, Czech women have worse access to these jobs than Czech men (Plasová and Válková, 2009). Third, the lack of day care services prevents children from a collective and educational type of care that is in line with the Czech discourse about childcare facilities but differs a lot from other European countries<sup>4</sup> (Saxonberg, 2008).

Since the Barcelona targets<sup>5</sup> were set in 2002, the Czech Republic has not done much to contribute to their achievement. Instead, the last government stated during the Czech EU Presidency, 12 crucial reasons why these targets cannot be reached. Amongst them it was stated that the Czech Republic has its own experience with day care for children below 3 years of age,

1 "A de-familializing regime is one which seeks to unburden the household and diminish individuals' welfare dependence on kinship." (Gosta Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 51 In: Leitner, 2003).

2 Leitner (2003) distinguishes between explicit familialism, which stresses the caring function of the family, optional familialism, which provides day care services to the families and the composition of care is chosen by the carers, and finally implicit familialism, which does not provide families with the needed services and family care is thus necessary (Leitner, 2003).

3 However, some authors consider Czech family policy to be explicitly familialistic.

4 Saxonberg (2008) shows that, whereas in Sweden the improvement of childcare means better access to the childcare facilities, in the Czech Republic it is vice versa. Czech discourse about childcare connects care in the family with quality and the well-being of children. Institutional care is considered as of inferior quality because of high illness incidences and emotional suffering. However, Saxonberg shows that these statements are often based on unreliable studies or misinterpreted data and have often ideological bases.

5 "Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age." (Presidency conclusions: Barcelona European Council, 2002, p. 13).

which has been proved unsatisfactory by psychological research, that demand is almost nonexistent and that the principle of subsidiarity<sup>6</sup> should be widely applied (Twelve points to the intention of the Czech presidency to open a discussion on the Barcelona targets<sup>7</sup>, 2009). Moreover, the statement suggested that the other Member States are not able to reach the goals and that the Czech Republic does not even desire to do so. The interim government that rules the country since the fall of Mirek Topolánek's government in 2009 however has the courage to find solutions for the crucial lack of childcare facilities, especially for the children of under 3 years of age (Suchá, 2010). Their proposal seeks to extend the target group of children in the kindergartens to 2 year old children. This is in accordance with the latest changes of parental leave when parents can decide to take up the benefits only for 2 years but have to face the lack of institutional childcare for their 2 year old children. This should solve the misconnection between both the system of benefits and the childcare services provided by the state at lower costs than opening new nurseries. It also shifts inter alia the care for these children from current nurseries considered as health care facilities to kindergartens considered as part of the education system. Although this proposal tries to get closer to the achievements of the Barcelona targets, approval by the political parties is not evident as the parliamentary parties hold diverse views on the issue.

Based on the above mentioned points this paper aims to analyse the political electoral programmes of the parliamentary parties in order to answer the following question: "What childcare policy measures do parliamentary parties propose in their electoral programmes for the elections in 2010?" The proposals will be classified in regard to the ideologies behind. Thus the paper will examine the focus of various measures, either on children or on the work-care reconciliation. At the same time the potential impacts on the work-care division in families will be taken into account. The paper first describes the latest developments in Czech childcare policy and then it mentions the theoretical models that are used to create a two-dimensional analytical framework. This is followed by an analysis of the electoral programmes for the elections in 2010.

## LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

This part of the paper will introduce briefly the changes that have been made in the Czech family policy over the last 20 years. It will focus on the childcare measures and the changes in parental leave provision that might have an impact on the chosen type of care. First, we introduce the changes in the system of leaves and benefits, and then we focus on institutional childcare.

Czech maternity leave accompanied by the compensation of income in the form of an allowance in pregnancy and motherhood has not changed significantly and is still provided to mothers for 28 weeks (37 weeks in case of multiple delivery or for a single mother). The compensation during the nineties was at a level of 90% of the previous income and has decreased to 69% in line with changes in the social insurance system (Kotýnková, Kuchařová, and Průša, 2003). This allowance is only designated for mothers, is not means tested and is limited by a given ceiling.

Parental leave is dedicated to either the mother or father of a child until the age of 4. Since the beginning of the nineties fathers could provide full day care to their children, but only since 2001 have they the right to the financial compensation. The level of the compensation has changed several times, first as an amount given by the subsistence level time coefficient 1,1 and later 1,54. In January 2008 a multi-speed parental leave was introduced. The absolute amount is given for the chosen length of leave<sup>8</sup> (No. 117/1995 Col., as amended). The limits of income parallel to the parental leave were cancelled and parents are not restricted in their incomes since they ensure the day childcare by an adult person. Children under the age of 3 may not go to nurseries for more than 5 days a month and children older than 3 may not spend more than 4 hours a day in kindergartens in

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6 Here we can distinguish the feature of explicitly familialistic childcare policy.

7 The Czech original is titled as Dvanáct bodů k snahám českého předsednictví otevřít debatu o barcelonských cílech.

8 The amount is 11.400 CZK for the 2-year duration, 7.600 CZK for the 3-year duration and 3.800 CZK for the 4-year duration (No. 117/1995 Col., as amended).



order for the parent to still have the right to the benefit. Since the multi-speed system has become effective, parents have the right to choose how long they stay at home with their children. In reality the immense shortage of nurseries cause that the shortest alternative (2-year long) can hardly be taken up. The system of leaves and compensations is currently not interconnected to the system of institutional childcare.

Nurseries that provided care for children from the ages 0 to 3 started to be shut down in the nineties. In 1990 there were 1,043 nurseries with 39,829 places that went to 1,587 places within 47 nurseries in 2007 (Kuchařová et al, 2009). Such a sharp fall in the number of nurseries meant that from 13.2% of children in 1989 (Saxongerg and Sirovátka, 2006) it diminished to 1% of children under 3 placed in nurseries in 1997 (den Dulk, Peper, Doorne-Huiskes, 2005). A certain number of places in nurseries may sometimes be occupied by a larger number of children as they are used as “five-days-a-month” day care service (ÚZIS ČR, 2008). Children under 3 that have no access to nurseries may be taken care of in kindergartens. However, this is quite rare as the capacities of kindergartens are also short (Kuchařová, 2006).

Most of the children in nurseries are from 2 to 3 years old (54%), 23% of children are older than 3 and 22% of children in nurseries are between the ages 1 and 2. Younger children are almost not present in nurseries (1%) (Kuchařová et al, 2009). Among the criteria for children to be taken to day care in nurseries are that at least one parent works (62%) and that the family has a permanent address within the locality (57%) (Kuchařová et al, 2009). This shows that the highest demand for care is created by parents of 2 year old children that possibly may choose to take up the shortest alternative of parental leave. Apart from nurseries there is also formally a possibility to provide care for children younger than 3 years of age as an entrepreneurial activity. The conditions to establish a private nursery are very complex and at the same time difficult to meet, so this would clearly have an impact on the price of such services.

For children from 3 to 6 (potentially 7 depending at what age the child starts the obligatory school attendance) the day care is provided in kindergartens. The number of kindergartens diminished from 7,335 kindergartens in school year 1990/91 to 4,808 kindergartens in 2007/08 (ČSÚ, 2008). The decrease was partially caused by the decentralisation of responsibility for kindergartens from national level to regional and local levels. At present, around 98% of the kindergartens are run by municipalities, the rest by regions and churches and some are private. The number of children from the ages 3 to 6 in kindergartens relatively increased. In 1989 78.9% of children from the ages 3 to 6 were placed in kindergartens where in 1999 it was already 85% and in 2002 it went up to 94.7% children in the mentioned age group (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006; den Dulk, Peper, Doorne-Huiskes, 2005). The “four-hours-a-day” attendance is not preferred by the kindergartens because of financial reasons, however teachers find a slow adaptation of children in this model quite positive (Kuchařová et al, 2009). As long as the capacity of kindergartens is not sufficient, there exists a whole set of criteria that parents usually have to fulfil to have the right to place their children in kindergartens. It has been shown that the most important ones are permanent address within the city/town or city district where the kindergarten is based, age of child and both parents in paid work (Kuchařová et al, 2009).

Kindergartens are more popular among people than nurseries. The preference to place children in nurseries is very low whereas it increases when it concerns a child above 3 years of age to be placed in a kindergarten (Sirovátka and Bartáková, 2008). Parents of children above 4 prefer day care outside family in 65-75%. Families claim that they prefer financial help to institutional day care for children under 3 but preferences for paternity leave are quite low (Sirovátka and Bartáková, 2008). This shows the strength of gender discourse that women should be the caregivers. Table 1 also shows that Czech men ensure care for their children by their partners whereas Czech women count on their relatives or on institutional care. Least they rely on care for their children provided by their partners.

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Type of care	Women	Men	Total
Institutional childcare (including nanny)	136.9	101.5	238.4
Partner living in the same household	97.1	499.6	596.7
Relatives/ neighbours/ friends	205.2	110.9	316.1
No type of childcare used	131.4	86.3	217.6

**Table 1. Main type of care used by the employed persons between 20 and 49 years old for own/spouse's children up to 14 while working, 2005**

Source: Eurostat, 2009

The last elected government had prepared and in 2009 proposed a great amendment to the laws and regulations concerning childcare and family policy – so called “Pro-family package”. It contains several proposals of which some are related to childcare and some to the leaves and allowances. It proposes to facilitate the establishing of a system of mutual parental assistance and mini-kindergartens in companies. The other measure enables that the companies with mini-kindergartens would be tax-preferred. The package counts on implementing the paternity leave and wants to change the financing of foster care (Soubor prarodinných opatření – Prarodinný balíček, 2009).

Mutual parental assistance and mini-kindergartens in companies is especially of interest for this paper. The first of these measures means that parents who want to get back to work and do not have an opportunity to place their child/children in institutional care would use the service of other caring parents who care for his/her child under 7 years of age. Such a “nanny from the neighbourhood” – the provider of the service – would need to be registered and would need to fulfil conditions given by this law (space, food, hygiene). The number of children cannot exceed 4 including own caregivers child/children. The caregiver can not be paid more than 5,000 CZK per child per month and thus the earnings would not exceed 15,000 CZK per month. Such income is tax-free. This measure has been criticized because the quality of provided care is hard to assess and the conditions are much vaguer than those for kindergartens or private kindergartens. The Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs argued however that opening new state institutions of care to cover the demand by strong cohorts would be too costly and once the baby boom is over they would need to be closed again. According to Nečas (2008) the mutual parental assistance would help to satisfy this increased demand for places in kindergartens and would help those who have no access to institutional care because of geographic insufficient coverage.

The mini-kindergartens can be run by employers for children of their employees, non-governmental organisations and public regional and local bodies. Such service provided to parents should be not-for-profit and it should not be provided for more than 4 children at the same time. The family character of this service should be kept. It is targeted at children from the ages 6 months to 7 years and it is an alternative to the institutional care provided by the state. The provision of the service is tax-free for the providers and this should reinforce companies to offer this kind of service to their employees.

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This “Pro-family package” has not been agreed before the government fell in spring 2009. Only after the elections in 2010 will we know if this package of measures would still have a chance to be put into practice. In the meantime the interim government proposes to extend the group of children in kindergartens to 2-year old but every political party has different ideas and proposals concerning childcare. What is the future of the Czech childcare policy? What measures political parties propose?

**CHILDCARE POLICY MEASURES IN PARTY PROGRAMMES FOR THE 2010 ELECTIONS**

This analysis will focus only on childcare policy measures, such as the above mentioned nurseries and kindergartens and other measures that concern care about children at pre-school age. For this analysis the proposals in electoral programmes of parliamentary parties will be taken into account. First a theoretic framework will be introduced followed by clarification of method for analysis and analysis itself.

**Theoretic framework**

For analysis of proposals by political parties we choose to focus our attention at:

- (A) policy motives to implement certain types of care;
- (B) a division of care that certain types of care contribute to.

Institutional Dimension	Educational Model	Work-care Reconciliation Model
Approach	Universal	Targeted
Entitled person(s)	Children	Parent/child with special needs
Pedagogic concept	Pedagogic objectives (education)	Mainly care
Size and organization of groups	Relatively large groups (similar to school classes)	Smaller groups
Fees	No school fees	Both (state and parental contribution)

**Table 2. Simplified overview of the institutional dimensions affected by the different goal-setting of public childcare system**

*Source: Scheiwe and Willekens (2009)*

There are various policy motives that may lead to the implementation of public childcare systems. Scheiwe and Willekens (2009) distinguish two groups of motives for public childcare – the idea that children at pre-school age need public education and the idea of facilitating work-care reconciliation (as shown in Table 2). The idea that small children need education might

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be based on various notions. One is *child-centred* assuming that for a good development a child needs to be in the company of other children and an adult (or adults) from outside family. The other concept is *state- or society-centred* and considers the public education for small children as a chance to equalize the opportunities among these children.

The table shows how educational and work-care reconciliation models differ and it definitely mirrors in the design of care. The educational model can be more associated with public nurseries and kindergartens whereas the work-care reconciliation model can be more connected to mini-nurseries, mini-kindergartens and private nannies.

When it comes to a division of care, we may identify actors that play roles in childcare provision. Traditionally, the key actors are mothers. This is connected to the strong male “breadwinner” tradition where men were breadwinners and women caregivers. The feminists have criticized the disadvantages connected to not fully commodified labour of female caregivers (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Rubery, Smith and Fagan (1999) distinguish among various intensities of the male breadwinner model – strong, modified and weak. In the strong model men are the breadwinners and women and children are dependent on him. Social benefits and services are connected to the work of a man and support childcare in families. The weak male breadwinner model is typical for its individual approach in the benefit system and the state facilitates the part-time work. The modified model is a mixture of measures from both of the above mentioned models. Sainsbury (2001) proposes a division to two models – male breadwinner (in any intensity) and individual. This is embedded in the welfare system and in the individual model all citizens are treated the same and have a right to benefits depending on their own activity and situation. Korpi (2000) proposes a distinction among models of general family support, the dual-earner model and the market-oriented model. In the first one, mothers are the key caregivers, in the second one, both parents and the state share childcare, and in the third one, both parents and the marketised carer divide childcare. Although some European societies that are individualist may seem to provide good conditions for equal childcare division among parents, the measures supporting the care in families (of whatever length) are still used and taken up mostly by women. That is why a concept of “universal caregiver” based on the ideas of gender deconstruction emerged. It simply suggests that current life patterns and strategies of women in the field of work-care reconciliation should become a norm for everyone (Borchorst and Siim, 2002).

Activity	1998	2000	1998	2000	1998	2000
	Man		Both equally		Woman	
Cooking	4	3	10	10	86	87
Shopping	21	5	38	27	41	68
Housework	1	1	21	25	78	74
Childcare	0	0	27	28	45	50
Earning money	48	51	46	45	5	4

**Table 3. Division of work in the Czech households by sex (%)**

Source: Kalnická (2000)

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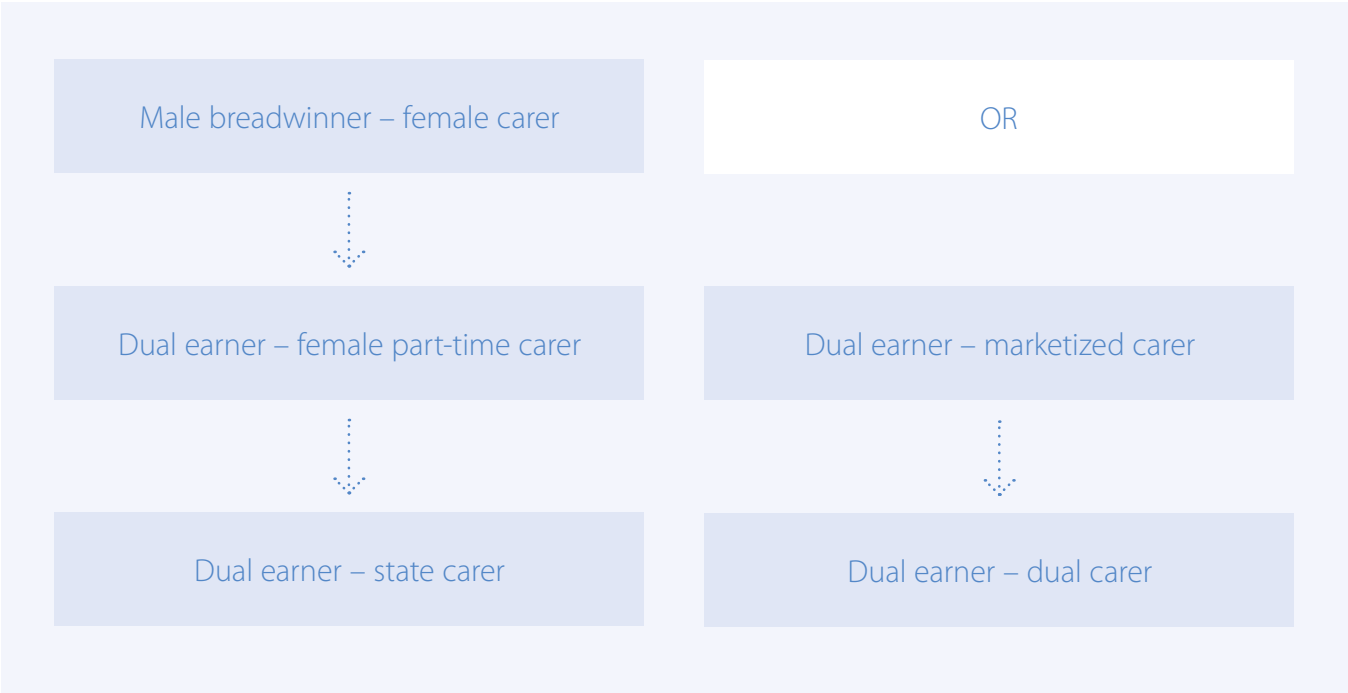
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Such suggestion is however far from being feasible in the Czech context. As shown in Table 3 women bear most of the housework and childcare obligations and work in a paid job at the same time.

The care providers thus might be mother, father, state institutions, and organisations and individuals on the market or not-for-profit sector or a combination of all these providers. Crompton mentions (1999) these key actors in childcare when developing a scheme of the way from traditional to the “ideal”<sup>9</sup> division of care.



**Figure 1. Division of care between parents, state and market**

Source: Rosemary Crompton (1999)

We will use this description of process simply as a composition of models of the care division. It proposes a quite complex overview of models, however for our analysis we will disregard the process of change from one model to another.

Thus our analysis will show if the proposed measures are based on educational or work-care reconciliation models. At the same time the proposed measure will be assessed from the viewpoint of care division among the key childcare providers.

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9 Dual earner – dual carer may seem to be an ideal model of division of care and unpaid labour for feminist scholars, however it does not have to be ideal division for the Czech families.

## Method

This analysis will focus on the policy motives for the implementation of childcare measures. It will apply the two-model approach defined by Scheiwe and Willekens (2009) and the attention will be paid to ideology behind any proposed measure. Thus all proposals will from this point of view be divided into educational centred and work-care reconciliation centred.

The analysis also shows divisions of care among defined key actors in childcare that would be supported by various proposed measures. For such analysis the composition of models developed by Crompton (1999) will be used.

The method used in this paper is document analysis. This analysis is carried out using the electoral programmes of parliamentary parties for the elections in 2010. The clear proposals as well as clear refusals of any childcare measure are taken into account and analysed. However, this paper is not using a critical discourse approach. It does not match ideological objectives and aims with the language and expressions used in the text. Currently, it concerns 6 political parties of which 5 won their mandate in the last parliamentary elections and 1 was created meanwhile and is composed of members of the Chamber of Deputies. Namely, the programmes of ODS (Neo-liberals), ČSSD (Social Democrats), KSČM (Communists), KDU-ČSL (Christians Democrats), SZ (Green Party) and TOP09 (Conservatives) are taken into account.

For the analysis a two-dimensional framework based on the above mentioned approaches was created and childcare measures were distributed in the framework according to the characteristics of the used categories (see [Table 4](#)). The measures placed in Table 4 comprise of:

- *childcare measures* – private/public nurseries, kindergartens, mini-nurseries, mini-kindergartens, private caregivers ("nannies"), mutual parental assistance, public family care, part-time attendance in nursery or kindergarten, mother and family centres;
- *leaves* that have a clear impact on the division of care – long-term leaves, paternity leave;
- *advantages and special conditions* that have a clear impact on the division of care – support for part-time jobs for caring mothers, support for part-job for caring parents, tax deductions of costs on private caregiver, allowance for childcare outside home.

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	Male breadwinner – female carer	Dual earner – female part-time carer	Dual earner – marketised carer	Dual earner – state carer	Dual earner – dual carer
Educational Model		part-time jobs for caring mothers  part-time attendance in nursery or kindergarten  mother and family centres	private nurseries  private kindergartens  mother and family centres (providing childcare)	nurseries  kindergartens  public family care	
Work-care Reconciliation Model	long-term leaves	part-time jobs for caring mothers  private caregivers ("nannies")  tax deductions of costs on private caregiver  allowance for childcare outside home	mutual parental assistance  private mini- nurseries  private mini- kindergartens  private caregivers ("nannies")  tax deductions of costs on private caregiver  allowance for working parents for childcare outside home	mini-nurseries  mini-kindergartens	paternity leave  part-time jobs for caring parents  quota for sharing care

**Table 4. Distribution of childcare measures using the two-dimensional model**

Source: own contribution

The analysis itself is done by rating the programmes giving them + or – for every measure proposal or refusal mentioned in the programme. Only the above defined measures are rated in the analysis and it fully disregards other measures connected to family policy, such as allowances and benefits not connected to full day care.





The political programmes use different discourses to speak about family policy, gender and childcare. The gender-equality discourse as an outcome of European Union efforts (e. g. A Roadmap towards equality) is used quite frequently in the programmes of the Neo-liberals, the Green Party and the Social Democrats. The programme of Christian democrats is family-centred and the Communist programme likewise.

The starting point of the Czech Republic is not neutral. As described earlier it is mainly kindergartens that provide institutional day care for children although not in sufficient extent. They were established based on ideas coherent with the educational model. Thus those parties that speak only about maintenance of the current system are somehow supporting measures within the educational model. However, most of the analysed electoral programmes in their proposals go beyond the simple maintenance of these institutions.

In regard to the policy motives for implementing childcare measures the programmes differ quite extensively in the number and variety of proposed measures. As shown in Table 5 Conservatives mention only one measure connected to childcare whereas the Green Party comes up with a wide range of measures. The Conservative Party proposes only tax deductions on provable expenses on private childcare and housework<sup>10</sup> (TOP 09, 2009). The Neo-liberals propose many various measures but at the same time claim that the existing kindergartens should remain maintained and should still serve as a main pillar of pre-school education. Among the work-care reconciliation measures there is the mutual parental assistance, mini-kindergartens and allowances for working parents for childcare outside home<sup>11</sup> (ODS, 2009). The Christian Democrats are in line with the Neo-liberals concerning the mutual parental assistance and private mini-kindergartens. These two measures were proposed in the pro-family package elaborated by the coalition composed of the Neo-liberals, the Christian democrats and the Green Party. They also proposed to establish mother and family centres. These three parties are rather focussed on the work-care reconciliation but keeping the existing kindergartens based on the educational motives (KDU-ČSL, 2009).

Political Party	Educational Model	Work-care Reconciliation Model
Conservative	0	+
Neo-liberals	+	+++
Christian Democrats	+	++
Green Party	++++	+++
Social Democrats	+++	0
Communists	++	0

Table 5. Rating of electoral programmes regarding the policy motives in childcare

Source: own contribution

The Green Party is quite outstanding among all because of the wideness of the range of measures. They want to reinforce work-care reconciliation and at the same time they want to extend the public care based on the notion of flexibility that is

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10 The ceiling for acceptable provable costs is proposed at a level of minimum wage. This measure should be effective until 10 years of age of the child.

11 This measure is targeted at the working parents that do not take up parental leave and have no access to public childcare (e. g. feeble geographical coverage). The condition to have rights to this allowance is 40% co-financing by parents. The ceiling is at a level of 2.000 CZK per month and the allowance can be given only until the child is 6 years old.

central in their programme (SZ, 2009). Apart from the support to already established nurseries and kindergartens they want to create more mother and family centres and private kindergartens. Also mini-nurseries and mini-kindergartens should be created and conditions for private caregivers (“nannies”) should be simplified. Otherwise all the services should be flexible and part-time attendance in nurseries and kindergartens is to be facilitated. The Social Democrats offer the support to the nurseries and kindergartens as well as strengthening the system of leisure activities for children in public organisations (such as schools) (ČSSD, 2010). Although they mention that companies should be more family-friendly, the programme does not contain any policies that could lead to promoting a family-friendly approach. Communists do not propose any new measures but want to support the existing ones (KSČM, 2009). The system of nurseries and kindergartens should be strengthened. Quite surprisingly next to the investments into the public care they propose the parental allowance of 3-year duration at a level of 14.000 CZK per month which may lead to the outflow of children from public day care.

The parties from the right wing of the political spectrum propose policies that are rather based on the work-care reconciliation model. Their arguments to support thus measures are basically the following: (1) facilitating work-care reconciliation; (2) the creation of additional workplaces; and (3) savings in public expenditures<sup>12</sup>. The leftist parties want to extend the capacities of the existing services (nurseries and kindergartens) and other key concepts in their programmes that concerned families are connected rather to allowances and benefits. The Green Party supports various measures to facilitate work-care reconciliation but also to provide pre-school education. Their measures are from both defined models (educational and work-care reconciliation).

Political Party	Male breadwin- ner – female carer	Dual earner – female part-time carer	Dual earner – marketised carer	Dual earner – state carer	Dual earner – dual carer
Conservative	0	0	+	0	0
Neo-liberals	0	0	+++	+	+
Christian Democrats	0	+	+++	0	+
Green Party	-	+	+++	+++	+++
Social Democrats	0	0	0	+++	0
Communists	+	0	0	++	0

**Table 6. Rating of electoral programmes regarding the division of childcare**

Source: own contribution

Various proposals by political parties contribute to different divisions of childcare among the key actors. The right-wing parties prefer such measures that would be provided by the market and would not be public (see Table 6). The role of “marketised carer” increases and enables the traditional female caregivers – mothers – to return to the labour market. Among rightists the Neo-liberals also propose one week of paid paternity leave claiming that fathers should also have the right to stay home

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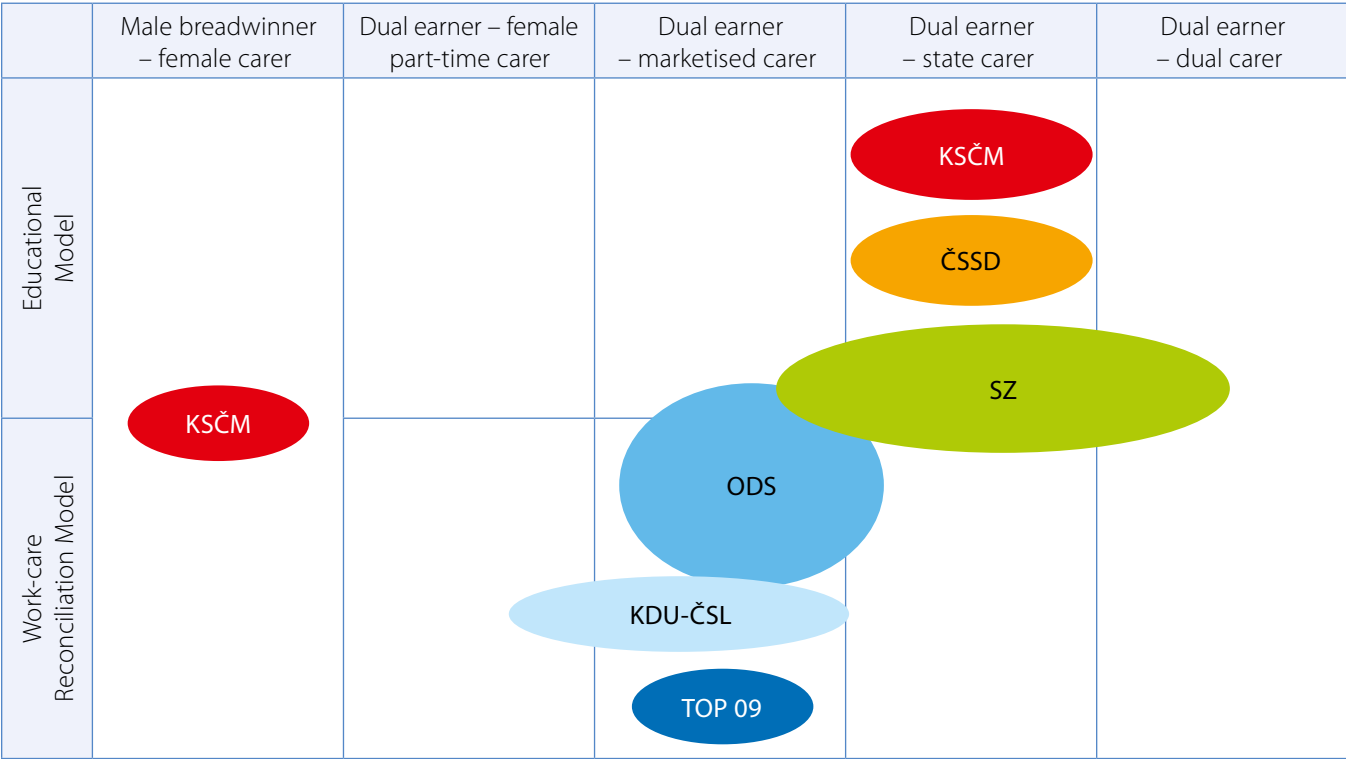
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12 The demand for day childcare is recently quite strong because of “baby-boom”. State may save financial means on not opening new public day care institutions that later, once the “baby-boom” is over, would need to be closed for the reason of insufficient demand. However, the demand would not necessarily need to decrease if in the meantime there was a shift in the public opinion about childcare.

and care for their children. This may contribute to the “dual earner – dual carer” division of labour. The Christians in this sense propose part-time jobs for caring parents. Such measures may strengthen the “dual earner – female part-time carer” model but may also lead to the “dual earner – dual carer” model division of childcare.

The Green Party is the only one that clearly refuses the “male breadwinner – female carer” model and supports such measures that engage market, state and father much more in childcare than it is now. To promote the “dual earner – dual carer” model they would provide paid paternity leave, part-time jobs for caring parents and quota for sharing care<sup>13</sup>. The role of the state in childcare should be according to the Green Party strengthened by supporting the existing public childcare facilities. Also private childcare providers should be supported to reinforce the role of the market in childcare. The Social Democrats and Communists basically want to strengthen public childcare.

From Table 6 it is clear that almost no parties prefer the traditional “male breadwinner – female carer” model. This shows a small shift in public thinking about care giving. The wave of refamilialisation that was very strong in the nineties might probably be over if at least some of these proposed measures are implemented. On the other hand, the political parties, apart from the Green Party, do not strongly articulate a support to the “dual earner – dual carer” model. Most of the childcare should thus be done either by private organisations and private caregivers or in public institutions.



**Table 7. Location of political parties within the “policy motives – division of childcare” framework**  
*Source: own contribution*

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13 If both of the parents exchange the role of caregivers for a significant period of time, they should be financially advantaged.

The changes in childcare policy however depend on the results of the elections and possible created coalitions. Table 7 shows where the political parties can be placed within the “policy motives – division of childcare” framework and what they may have in common. The Green Party has a wide range of measures and may thus find common fields with either Social Democrats or Neo-liberals and Christian Democrats.

The Neo-liberals also have great potential to find common ground with other parties because they have many various measures in their programme. In general, right-wing parties rather prefer to support private providers to get the market involved in childcare and left-wing parties prefer to keep the state involved extensively in childcare. Also the motives differ – leftists base their proposals on the notion of education whereas rightists might rather stress the work-care reconciliation. This is not fully the case for the Neo-liberals who claim that public care as pre-school education must stay a key player in the childcare provision.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to analyze the electoral programmes of Czech parliamentary political parties aiming at answering the question: “What childcare policy measures do parliamentary parties propose in their electoral programmes for the elections in 2010?”. The analysis focussed on policy motives to implement certain types of measures and a division of childcare among the key care providers that certain types of measures may contribute to.

It has been shown that Conservatives, Neo-liberals and Christian Democrats offer measures targeting work-care reconciliation and these are to be implemented by private care providers. On the other hand, Social Democrats and Communists prefer to maintain and enlarge the existing public childcare institutions – nurseries and kindergartens – with educational motives behind. The Green Party pays the most attention to childcare policy as it proposes a complete set of various measures. Some of these are motivated by the educational model; the others target the facilitation of work-care reconciliation. These measures may contribute to various divisions of care – “dual earner – marketised carer”, “dual earner – state carer” or “dual earner – dual carer”.

If the new government formed after the elections tends to be rightist, that will lead to a strengthening of the role of the market in childcare. A leftist government would rather prefer to support public childcare. If the Green Party is to be given a chance to implement their proposals, that will lead to the development of a complete range of flexible services. However, their chances seem to be quite weak. Many other compositions of coalition may be made after the elections and each may lead to a different design of childcare policy measures. But in general, we cannot expect that childcare policy measures would contribute strongly to the “dual earner – dual carer” model. Instead of fathers it will be rather market, state or both that will provide the day care to children.

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## REGULATIONS

No. 117/1995 Col., as amended

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This paper documents the changing objectives of Hungarian family policy, as well as the measures taken over the past 20 years. Its aim is to identify the effect of stated objectives (as opposed to economic constraints) on shaping policies, and to assess the coherence and success of the policy measures.

Until recently, the high share of cash benefits within family provisions has received little attention in policy making and research, and politicians are only now beginning to recognize the implications of such benefits for employment policy. The main aim of family provisions in Hungary has traditionally been to increase fertility; but the priority attached to this aim has been reduced significantly by budgetary constraints – since the only fertility incentive known to politicians was to increase cash benefits. Conservative and left-wing governments have tended to use different rhetoric to support their family policies, but the measures they have implemented have not always differed so very much – something that is partly due to the obligations imposed on them by the European Union.

The interventions that have occurred in family policy (values, goals, measures and effects) have varied with government administrations ever since the change of the regime and the end of state socialism. This study describes and evaluates this process. A number of issues regarding definitions and logic have cropped up in the process, and we have therefore tried to interpret the terms used in a uniform action-theory framework. Thus, terminology is used in a way that is different from usual. The genre, too, is unusual: this study attempts to merge political science (political measures and laws), sociology (methodology, theory) and social policy (values, measures, effects).

## RESEARCH ISSUES, METHODOLOGY

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What influences decision makers more: economic conditions or their declared values?
- Where are these declared values rooted? Do they make up a uniform system of values?
- Is it possible to separate actions based on formal-procedural rationality and those based on instrumental rationality?
- Which government strategy of family policy is successful (i.e. which realizes its goals and which does not) and why?

As a means of empirical testing, we have primarily used document analysis. We have collected and analysed government policy, laws, parliamentary debates, proposed amendments and effect studies.

1 This paper was first published in Hungarian, in *Demográfia* 2008, Volume 51, Issue 4.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework for the study was provided by the scientific theory, action theory and methodology of Max Weber (Weber 1998 [1917]). According to this, no scientific proof may be adduced for value axioms: they can only be raised as concepts and, derived from their consequences, means and side-effects, *new* value axioms can be created. Therefore, according to Weber, there is no point in debating the correctness of values (which cannot be compared in and of themselves) and the only thing the researcher can decide for sure is whether the action or initiative is *correct* – whether measure X is, in fact, a means of achieving result Y. At the same time, these values may be placed in a broader context – in this particular case, the context of the economic and social situation. And thus we can decide whether or not the specific value leads to a successful action within this socio-economic context. We can also ascertain whether any goals have been set or means selected in line with the value (substantive-value-rational action)<sup>2</sup> or whether the means and values have been defined according to goals (formal-procedural-rational action).<sup>3</sup> In our opinion, the whole issue is not simply about ‘different macro-economic conditions of the various periods...and various ideologies, intentions for social politics and the eventualities of current politics standing behind...the changes’ (Ignits and Kapitány, 2006, 383). Albeit only hypothetically, this study concludes that value selection (the set of cultural variables) has more of an effect on decision making (i.e. the selection of means) than do hard or structural variables.

The specific socio-economic context may not be disregarded even when the *effects* are analysed. However, this type of multiple analysis would extend way beyond the framework of our study; the specific effects are described by presenting those found in the literature, with some of them empirically tested and others only outlined hypothetically.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to be able to evaluate the system of values, goals, measures and (side-) effects of the family policy actions of successive governments, we need to clarify a few principles of public policy and their relationship to each other. The first is public policy. ‘Public policy is an area of politics that, on the one hand, includes the content of politics (the public goals to be implemented) and, on the other, the political decision-making process (selection of public goals, definition of the strategy of implementation)... Subordinate policies may belong to the family of public policy...’ (Domszky 2004). In terms of their effects and measures, these public policies often overlap. Yet, they may be interpreted and distinguished as different priorities of societal politics (a system of goals and measures) – i.e. they do not simply form a thematic unity.

The relationship of the various terms is, however, more complex. It is clear that the most comprehensive category is that of societal policy: ‘societal policy is defined as an institutional system whose primary goal is protection against those risks that endanger the human resources as the basis for the reproduction of society. In a positive approach, the goal of societal policy is to develop human capital’ (Czibere 2006, 63). This definition of societal policy is also close to the concept of social safety or security (ILO 1984). Within the framework of social policy, we can identify public policies representing various priorities. Family policy is different in many respects. ‘Family policy is distinguished from the other system of measures of societal policy in that income risk is a factor to avoid and carries a negative connotation, while to have children is intentional and carries a positive meaning’ (Czibere 2006, 64). However, as explained above, family policy in and of itself is not a system of goals and measures, but is rather the end result and effect of other public policies. It is easy to accept that influencing the lives of families cannot be just a government effort. The goals and the related measures have therefore been incorporated into family policy from other public policies.

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2 Weberian terminology states that an action is to be considered substantive-value rational if it is defined by a faith in a personal value of ethical, religious or other nature, regardless of its success (Weber 1987).

3 An action qualifies as formal-procedural-rational if the actor expects some kind of behaviour from the objects of the outside world and other people, and uses this expectation as a means or condition to successfully achieve their rationally selected and considered (individual) goals.

The decisions and measures generally harness family policy to serve four or five social goals; thus, we can identify measures and programmes of *population policy*, *social policy* (including *child protection*), *employment policy*, *equal opportunity policy*, as well as general *societal policy*. Each and every government favours certain public policy goals within family policy, depending on the political system of values it espouses.<sup>4</sup> The effects of the measures implemented clearly indicate if the specific administration opted for appropriate measures suited to the specific goals (or if side effects made themselves felt –possibly intentional side effects) – i.e. if the specific family policy can be evaluated as ‘successful’ according to the Weberian concept.

Thus, the only term within public policy that defines a priority or a system of goals is *family policy* itself, which ‘...in the broadest sense includes *regulations and provisions* influencing, in any way, the lives of families with children. Consequently, the goals and measures of family policy may be fairly diverse, and its scope may include areas beyond social policy in the narrow sense, including health policy, housing policy or even media regulations. In a statistical sense...two significant groups may be identified: (1) financial aid provided to households for rearing children and (2) social services helping and protecting children... The first group includes sustained income subsidy, birth grant, parental leave, family or child benefit, extra income for dependants and other forms of financial support. Benefits in kind include state-funded nursery schools and kindergartens, accommodation, help in homes and other benefits’ (Gábos 2004). Instead of the term ‘family policy in a statistical sense’, this study uses the term *system of family benefits*, because our subject has been narrowed down to the changes in the benefit system (primarily financial aid).<sup>5</sup>

Possible goals for family policy:

- (1) *An increase in the fertility rate* and correction of the negative effects of welfare institutions within the welfare system (children are public assets but the cost of child rearing has to be covered by families). In this case, we are talking about the goals of *population policy*: ‘Population policy is an effort made by society, the state or any larger community of people to influence demographic processes and structures according to societal, national and community needs. This may be completed within the framework of directly passing democratic laws or adopting such measures. Here we are talking about the formulation of laws, legal practices and legal institutions that directly influence marriage, divorce, fertility or migration. In a broader sense, population policy includes economic, societal, cultural, etc. laws or initiatives that may have an impact on certain demographic processes. These include the income tax system, social policy and, more specifically, family policy, educational policy and health policy’ (Kollega 2006). Nowadays rejected by a great number of demographers, this definition places social needs before individual desires and needs, which runs counter to individual rights and freedoms; thus, a more accurate definition for population policy is that it is a means by which individual plans for having children may be realized.<sup>6</sup>
- (2) *Socially fair distribution of income* (solidarity with families with children, reduction in child poverty) is a social policy goal. Social policy in a structural-dynamic approach:
  - is a historical institutional system;
  - satisfies needs that are impossible to meet through market relationships;
  - operates through the means of redistribution; and
  - satisfies those needs that stem from the political-ideological commitments of the people in power, or those that are forced onto them by social conflict, or even those that serve the needs of those people.
- (3) Thus, social policy generally is an institutional form of the relationship between the state and its citizens (Zombori 1997).

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4 The concept of scale of values is used instead of ideology because the values represented by the various parties cannot be categorized into uniform ideological systems.

5 The naming and the function of benefits have undergone profound change in the course of the various political cycles; the table included in the appendix attempts to provide a summary of these.

6 Most studies on willingness to have children point out that the Hungarian population is child centred, since close to 90% prefer to have children; contrast this with the former East Germany, where the same percentage of the population believes that not having children is ideal. Cf. Pongrácz, Tiborné and S. Molnár, Edit (1997), ‘A gyermekvállalási magatartás alakulása’, in Katalin Lévai and István György Tóth (eds) *Szerepváltozások*. Budapest: TÁRKI.

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- When viewed from the perspective of its goals, '*social policy* intends to correct the disadvantageous consequences of socio-economic operation and the possible social tensions' (Horváth, Lázár and Wass 2004).
- (4) *Child protection policy* (more specifically, child welfare). However, 'while social policy primarily outlines and creates community actions in terms of satisfying individual and family needs...child protection policy...does the same in terms of parental care towards children' (Szöllősi 2000).
  - (5) *Improvement in female employment*, such as the development of services provided during the day to help in balancing the needs of work and of child rearing, and removal of the legal obstacles that discourage employment. Together, this makes up an *employment policy goal*.
  - (6) A family benefit system that balances out the different burdens of men and women in childcare and education – this serves *equal opportunity goals*.

In short, family policy (the family benefits system in the narrow sense) consists primarily of regulations and benefits (money and in kind) that may be harnessed to serve at least five different public policy goals (from population policy to equal opportunities).

Family policy benefits, as the possible effects of the measures available for the goals above, are summarized in Table 1.

Family benefit measure	Effect of the measure	Typical measure for this public policy
Universal family benefit	Reduction of poverty, influence on the number of 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> children born	Social policy, population policy
Employment-related benefits (TES, GYED)	Increases fertility rate and pre-natal employment, but has a negative effect in the post-natal period	Population policy, employment policy
Subsidies, income-dependent benefits (regular child protection benefit)	Reduction in social inequalities	Social policy
Tax benefits	Fertility increases for those able to take advantage of the benefit; encourages employment	Population policy, employment policy
Parental leave benefits (GYET, GYES)	Initially it increased completed fertility, but today it rather subsidizes and discourages employment	Population policy, social policy
Part-time employment, reduced working hours	May increase fertility, increases employment and reduces child poverty	Demographic and employment policy, child protection, equal opportunity
Benefits in kind: day care for children	Increases employment and (probably) also fertility rate, reduces child poverty*, support for child development**	Demographic and employment policy, child protection, equal opportunity

Notes: \* helps balance work and family-related duties; \*\* reducing disadvantaged status.

**Table 1. The main types of family benefits used at present and their social effects<sup>7</sup>**

.....

<sup>7</sup> Hypothetical effects, primarily based on Gábos (2005).

## SYSTEM OF FAMILY BENEFITS IN THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE REGIME CHANGE

Experts believe that the system of Hungarian family benefits<sup>8</sup> reached the peak of its evolution in the years immediately preceding the regime change, as 'the system of GYES and GYED worked, and family benefit reached its maximum extent' (Gábos 2005, 90); at the same time, 'the Hungarian family benefit system in 1990 was among the best in the world, both in terms of the percentage of GDP used for this purpose and its position among social expenditures' (Gábos and Tóth 2001, 125).

Maternity and parental leave benefits were related to insured legal status (birth grant, TES, GYED, GYES), whereas family benefit became universal in 1990. The purpose of these benefits was to ensure that, through its social security benefits, the state pursued a consistent policy to protect women, children and the family. The elements of this included:

- (1) Birth grant: eligibility required at least one visit to the doctor and a minimum of 180 days of insured status. Used to be available as a one-off allowance.
- (2) Maternity leave (TES): eligibility required 180 days of insured status prior to childbirth; if eligible, the amount was 65% of the daily average wage, and those who had been insured for at least 270 days received the full amount. Paid for the period of maternity leave (24 weeks).
- (3) Parental leave (GYED): paid to the insured up to the second birthday of the child if the insured received maternity leave (or was at least eligible under the stipulated conditions). Up to the first birthday of the child, only the mother (or single father) was eligible. The amount ranged from 65% to 75% of the daily average wage, depending on the number of insured days (180 for 65% or 270 for 75%).
- (4) Extended parental leave (GYES): after the GYED period expired and up to the third birthday of the child (tenth birthday for a child diagnosed with a long-term illness). The fixed amount increased with the number of children. Provision of this service depended on insured status.
- (5) Family benefit: aimed at providing state contribution to the costs of child rearing, granted universally up to the 20th birthday of the child, if still in education or if mentally ill. Differentiation was achieved on the basis of the number of children and parents (single parents received a higher amount). Financed from the state budget.
- (6) Family tax credit: taxable income could be reduced by HUF 1,000 per child per month (at least three children for couples or two for single parents, or when raising a child with a disability). The tax credit was available up to the 14th birthday of the child.

### Effects and evaluation:

- These measures had a positive effect on the fertility rate (especially GYED and the family benefit, but even GYES increased completed fertility). 'In general, leaving aside other factors, we believe that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s – the periods when the fertility rate increased – while the changes to GYED and the family benefit system did not in isolation bring about an increase in the fertility rate, the overall family policy of the time did' (Gábos 2005).
- The measure had no negative effects on employment before or after childbirth (maternity leave benefits were linked to insured status, and the capacity of the nursery-school system was greater).

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8 Act II of 1975 on social security; amendment to Act II of 1975 on social security (effective as of 1 January 1990); Act XXV of 1990 on family benefit; Decree no. 88/1989 (VII. 31.) of the Council of Ministers (GYES); Act VI of 1987 and Act XLV of 1989 (tax).

- Family benefit was fairly well targeted in terms of social policy (the reason being that poverty and an increase in the number of children correlate statistically – i.e. more family benefit money is given to poorer households with large families).
- It was one of the most generous family benefit systems in the world.

### THE SOCIAL MARKET ECONOMY OF THE ANTALL GOVERNMENT (1990–94)<sup>9</sup>

One of the first and most important tasks for the Antall administration was to carry through regime change both in politics and in the economy. The government programme drew a distinction between family and social policy. It attempted to create a framework for the social market economy, in which the state very visibly sought to mitigate the adverse effects on society of the market economy.

Family policy became strategically important, as the programme stated that the key support for the disadvantaged was the family. Its declared goal was to stop the demographic decline (by the turn of the century) and implement an effective system for embryo and child protection. The key phrase was a *'healthy family'* – to ensure the stability and healthy working of the family and to educate the youth to adopt a healthy lifestyle. This was presented as a government value – as a kind of response to society's anomie. This is why an Act was passed on embryo protection (abortion was strictly regulated), pregnancy benefit was introduced (instead of birth grant and as a retroactive extension of family benefit, as this new benefit was given from the fourth month of pregnancy at the same level as family benefit) and child raising support (GYET) was introduced under the Social Act of 1993 (thereby acknowledging the institution of professional motherhood). Within the concept of the conservative family ideal, the best people to raise children are the mothers – the 'integrators' of the family. From the perspective of the government, one of the positive side-effects was that this type of family model and benefit system accorded with the child-centred mentality of Hungarian families (and thereby increased its popularity); it also addressed the issue of unemployment, as women were now withdrawn from the labour market for an extended period of time (the 'welfare instead of work' principle). The cost to the state budget was reduced, as automatic earmarked state aid to nursery schools was discontinued.

Of the previous benefits, GYES, GYED, TES and family tax credit<sup>10</sup> continued to be provided, with insured status the condition for eligibility, and family benefit remained universal. The only change to benefits was that, as from 1992, GYES and GYED were no longer financed from the social security fund, but rather from the state budget. We should note that the minister of welfare had wide powers of discretion (e.g. the money could be granted even if the parent did not have the necessary insured period).

With the Social Act of 1993, GYET was introduced, and was linked to insured status. Dependent on the family's income, it was granted to parents who were bringing up three or more minors, up to the eighth birthday of the youngest child; the amount of this benefit was equal to the prevailing minimum old-age pension. The size of family benefit was increased annually to soften the effect of inflation on family consumption. (Today it would be almost inconceivable for the government to explain an increase in family benefit by the rise in fuel prices, for instance.)<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the system of benefits did not change substantially, but the real value of the benefits declined. An important positive development was that the Social Act created a system of social provision and began opening it up to wider sections of society (Lakner 2005, 10).

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9 Under the 'National Regeneration Programme' ('Nemzeti Megújódás Program').

10 Act XC of 1991 on individual income tax: HUF 1,300 per child per month may be used as a tax-deductible amount by individuals eligible for family benefit.

11 Reasons given for Act XCII of 1990: in order to partially compensate for the effects of the increase in fuel prices, as of 1 November 1990 the amount of family benefit is generally increased by HUF 100.

Objections from the opposition included:

- The system was too generous, compared to what other European states were doing.
- The system was not effective enough for certain groups.
- The law allowed the minister of welfare powers of discretion that were too wide.
- Universal family benefit was not just: people receive it even if they do not need the money.
- Family benefit encouraged people to live off their children. As an illustration, it is worth quoting a proposed amendment aimed at avoiding precisely that: family benefit should not be granted from the fourth child onward, because (1) with universal eligibility, the number of persons who received it would increase by 120,000. This would have a cost impact (an extra HUF 50.3 million in 1990 and HUF 80.8 million in 1991), which would place an almost intolerable strain on the state budget; (2) providing for children is not primarily the responsibility of the state, but of the parents; (3) there would be insufficient funds available for those genuinely in need of state assistance; (4) it would introduce a slippery slope: many would begin to live off family benefits after the birth of their fourth child. Having such large families was not welcome, as it cost a lot to aid them.<sup>12</sup> Later the literature began to replace the notion of 'living off children' with the concept of the 'strategic child', but the veracity of the hypothesis could not be proven empirically.
- The system conveyed an outdated image of a woman's role.
- The system conveyed an outdated image of family structure: it favoured natural parents over foster parents, and talked of a 'healthy family' without ever providing a definition.
- The system could not halt the decline in the fertility rate.

Effects of the changes to the system:

- The effects on employment were clearly negative: it was mainly middle-class women eligible for GYED who withdrew from the workforce (more took advantage of GYED than of GYES).<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the number of those using GYED declined steadily during the period, while those relying on GYES increased, since it was possible to apply for this latter benefit on the basis of 'fairness', even without insured status. Thus, an increasing number of people entered the system without ever having been employed, and thereby GYES began to function as social assistance.
- The demographic situation did not improve: 'as from 1992, fertility rates began to decline...' (Gábos 2000, 106). That said, this should not be regarded as a failure of the government's system of benefits. It is more to do with the fact that, for the first time, the political system had to face up to its own incompetence: it was/should have been obliged to reach the conclusion that reform of certain elements of the family benefit system, in and of itself, was not sufficient to achieve a substantial improvement in fertility rates.
- These welfare expenses imposed a significant burden on the state budget (the GDP-related ratio of family benefit expenditure reached 4.36% in 1991, and in 1994 was 3.85%) (Gábos 2000, 104).
- The family benefit system proved to have a steady effect on poverty reduction: 'during that period, family benefit – even with its reduced real value – was able to keep roughly the same proportion of families with children above the poverty threshold' (Gábos 2000).

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12 Amendment proposal no. 1402.977. Source: Library of the Hungarian National Assembly.

13 The number of those taking advantage of GYED fell from 155,000 to 129,000, while the number of those using GYES increased from 98,000 to 118,000 by the end of the administration (Czibere 2006, 69).



## THE HORN GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMIC STABILIZATION (1994–98)

The primary goal of the Horn administration was to achieve economic stability (the finance minister stated that the reasons for the economic problems were the extent, structure and operating method of state distribution). Family and social policy was subordinated to this, yet the curtailment of certain benefits was clearly designed as a wake-up call (Lakner 2005) – in fact, while the number of those eligible declined, administrative costs soared. According to the original intention, insured status would have remained the principal condition for applying for family benefit and parental leave, and a certain income ceiling or wealth criterion would have been attached (incomes up to HUF 10 million or a car valued at HUF 2 million); families with two employed persons would have been excluded; and the scrapping of GYED would have been compensated for by extending the TES period to one year. All this was to have been implemented very quickly (1 June 1995). If the original proposal had remained, 20% of families would have been excluded from the system of family benefits, saving the state budget approximately HUF 2 billion per month (Tóth 1996). However, the Constitutional Court blocked part of the proposal and refused to allow it to take effect on 1 June 1995. According to the judgement handed down by the court, the proposal did not provide families with enough time to adapt to the changes, and would have made the position of people who were soon have a child impossible to calculate. It should also (the court went on) be borne in mind that family policy should serve the goal of increasing the population. After all this, Act XXII of 1996 was passed with an amendment dealing with certain social benefits. It was less rigorous in terms of specifying eligibility conditions, yet it still created the toughest family benefit system in Hungary since the regime change.

Changes to the benefit system:

- (1) Birth grant: this replaced pregnancy benefit. It was a lump sum, to which all women who gave birth were entitled. The amount was made equal to 150% of the prevailing minimum old-age pension.
- (2) Maternity leave: 70% of the daily average income, if the woman was insured for at least 270 days in the preceding two years. Shorter periods of insurance (but still at least 180 days) qualified a woman for 60% of the daily wage during the term of the maternity leave. The term during which it could be claimed did not change.
- (3) GYED: as from 1999, even the option was discontinued – i.e. those who were eligible in April 1996 could claim it until 1999, but no new applications were accepted.
- (4) GYES: universal benefit but depended on income (the income ceiling for singles was HUF 23,400 (net) per month; in all other cases HUF 19,500 (net)). The duration of its payment counted as an employment service period. It could not be combined with other money benefits and was not paid if the parent received the day-care benefit for children. The amount of the benefit, regardless of the number of children, was the same as the minimum amount of the old-age pension. Any person receiving extended parental leave benefit was obliged to pay a 6% pension contribution.
- (5) GYET: universal but dependent on income.
- (6) Family benefit: contrary to the original plan, it remained universal. The net monthly income ceiling changed from the original HUF 17,000 to HUF 19,500 (then to HUF 25,000 (gross)), which was relatively high.<sup>14</sup> Foster parents were also eligible, regardless of whether they fulfilled the criteria for income and wealth; in addition, children in state care also received this benefit. Families or single parents rearing three or more children were universally eligible, regardless of their income

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<sup>14</sup> In 1996, the per capita net income of childless households was HUF 20,551; HUF 17,426 for families with one child; HUF 14,830 for those with two children; and HUF 11,374 for families with three or more children. Some 40% of families with children belonged to the three lowest income deciles. The average size of the households in the lowest decile was 4.2 persons (Bauer et al 2002).

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and wealth. The parents of a single child who lived together were made eligible for family benefit after the child's sixth birthday if at least one parent did not work or if the child had a long-term illness or a physical or mental disability.

- (7) Tax credit: discontinued.
- (8) Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and guardian administration introduced two<sup>15</sup> types of benefit for families that had difficulty covering their living expenses. The first was the regular child protection benefit, which was an income-dependent provision (the per capita income of the family could not be higher than the prevailing minimum old-age pension) and the monthly payment was equal to 20% of the minimum old-age pension. The second type was the extraordinary child protection allowance, which was a one-off payment to families. Both were awarded by the local government.

The government programme specified among its goals the provision of help for the needy (because the previous system was, so to speak, 'unfair') and an 'efficient and fair' social policy. In fact, family policy was interpreted both as a spending item of the state budget and as the channel for redistributing income. Thus, two goals were set: cost reduction (family benefit and GYED took up most of the money from the state budget (Gábos 2000, 108)) and improving the targeting of those in need.

On the evidence of the government programme, we may conclude that the 'needy' were defined primarily either as families with several children, where the mothers did not have any registered period as insured persons, or as those rearing children with disabilities. Under the new system, those with insurance lost out, because, if they had sufficient income prior to the birth of the child, they would not be eligible for GYES or family benefit after the TES period ran out (and nor would employment or nursery-school care be real alternatives for them). The benefit system was harmonized, and the same income-related eligibility conditions were set for family benefit, GYES and GYET. For this reason, the Social Act, the Act regulating family benefit, and the Acts on social security and on personal income tax had to be modified. The population policy goals disappeared; the criterion of the interests of the child was omitted; and improvement of the situation of mothers was not presented as one of the goals. This system did not encourage employment before or after childbirth, but it also made it impossible for the family to maintain an acceptable standard of living; thus, it did not make up the lost income, but only provided aid. The passage of the child protection law (the introduction of new money benefits), however, may definitely be interpreted as a positive development.

Amendment proposals and objections by the opposition (Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP), Alliance of Free Democrats (Fidesz), Hungarian Democratic People's Party (MDNP), Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP)):

- Regulation of family benefit would not guarantee that the sum was, in fact, used in the interests of the child (the proposal suggested using it as a means to encourage the schooling of school-age children).
- Population policy goals should not disappear from the system, even if reference is made to state budget priorities.
- The amount of family benefit should be tied to the minimum old-age pension, in order to avoid a decline in real value.
- The GYES period should be counted as a term of employment, even for those who were not eligible (this was actually incorporated into the law).
- Discontinuation of GYED was socially unjust (it placed previously active, working women in an unfair position), and thus those eligible for TES should get a higher amount of GYES.
- There was good reason to keep pregnancy benefit (the right of the embryo; the scrapping of it would violate the Act on the protection of embryonic life).

15 Actually four, but the advance on the child support fee and the support for establishing homes are too specific to be considered here.

- It would be sensible for the law to introduce positive discrimination in favour of the parents of three or more children; to this end, GYET should not be linked to any income ceiling.
- Family benefit should be made a universal right.
- The law was being rushed through, and so distress was being caused to families on account of children already conceived.

The reasons behind the proposed amendments presented population policy goals as values. At the same time, it was pointed out that the bill limited families' freedom of decision (whether to have children under the new conditions; willingness to have children = willingness to accept poverty). The opposition and the government had quite different interpretations of injustice and unfairness, and it is hardly surprising that they missed each other's points. According to government rhetoric, a family benefit system that treated everyone equally was unfair, and so the available resources had to be distributed according to the actual needs. The opposition considered unfair any family policy that disregarded social performance – meaning that those who paid more into the common budget should be able to take more out. It is not the analyst's task to choose between values, but let us see if the measures selected by the government were appropriate to its goals and values.

Direct and indirect effects of the measures (Gábos and Tóth 2001, 130–31):

- Expenditure on family support decreased (from 2.4% of GDP in 1994, by 1997 it had shrunk to 1.9%).
- Some 9% of families and 7% of children were excluded from the system.
- The targeted nature of the system did improve, but it was used by some people who were not eligible.
- Those excluded from the provisions were placed in a worse situation than those who qualified.
- Since the extent of child poverty depends greatly on welfare transfers (and more specifically on the forms of family support), it is not surprising that, since regime change, child poverty grew most significantly during the Horn administration.<sup>16</sup> The discontinuation of GYED, in particular, had a devastating effect.
- Administrative costs grew significantly, and this dramatically reduced the amount of savings to the state budget.
- There was a negative effect on the fertility rate.
- Many of the measures taken ostensibly to benefit the needy actually had the gravest consequences for those living in the worst conditions (e.g. modification of the income tax, issues related to provision of financial aid, stigma, lack of information, administrative costs) – social policy was altered largely in line with state budget considerations.
- The real value of social benefits decreased (the level of aid dropped).
- 'The testing of income, the application of income categories and the lower benefit level created a classic poverty trap' (Czibere 2006, 75).
- As the benefits previously taken for granted disappeared, so the financial situation of families became unpredictable and uncertain.

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16 Cf., for instance, Darvas, A. and Tausz, K. (2006) *Gyermeke-szegénység [Child Poverty]*, October, at [www.demos.hu](http://www.demos.hu).

## 'THE CIVIC FUTURE PROGRAMME AT THE SERVICE OF FAMILIES'<sup>17</sup> – THE FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEM OF THE ORBÁN ADMINISTRATION (1998–2002)

The goal of the Orbán administration's family policy was to reinstate the security of family life, to improve the conditions for having children and to stop the demographic decline of the country. The government's family policy was acknowledged to be not a policy for the poor: 'The decision to have children cannot be downgraded to a purely economic issue.'<sup>18</sup> Benefits are not alms, and thus any contribution to the cost of having children and running a family was to be made on a universal basis; certain forms of welfare benefit were only intended to top this up.

The stated target group was not to be confined to the needy (primarily) but was also to encompass 'citizens willing to take action for themselves and improve their situation through their own efforts',<sup>19</sup> as well as families. Again, the government's goal included recognition of the work done by mothers at home. This is well illustrated by the removal of GYET from the Social Act and its integration into the law on family support. At the same time, and in accordance with EU directives, one of the goals set out was the development of part-time employment as a means of balancing the requirements of bringing up children and of work. The government restored GYED (financed out of the state budget), the primary objective of which was to increase the fertility rate in families where 'significant loss of income is expected due to the decision to have children'.<sup>20</sup> Family tax credit was also restored (over time, it became the second most important element of the family support system, amounting to 25% of total family benefits by the end of the administration (Mózer 2001, Table 2)). The income ceiling for family benefit and GYES was scrapped, and the law acknowledged the fact that these provisions were intended to make up for the lost income of the parent staying at home and caring for the child.

Since the regime change, this administration was the first (and so far only) to pass a uniform Act on family support (Act LXXXIV of 1998 on the support of families).

Old and new elements of the system:

- (1) Child-rearing benefits: includes family benefit and the schooling contribution, both universal rights. According to the government, separation of these elements was justified, as it would encourage parents to send their school-aged children to school. The amount still depended on family type, the number of children and their health status. A new feature was that, when the *number* of children was defined, it also included those young adult children who were financially dependent on their parents during their college studies.
- (2) Parental leave benefits: GYES, GYET. These were benefits that did not depend on income and were available under the universal right. The period during which they were claimed would count towards the person's employment record, and the amount was made equal to the minimum old-age pension. At the same time as claiming GYES, the parent was allowed to take on a job for up to four hours a day once the child reached 1.5 years. A minor change: GYET was made available uniformly to all families until the eighth birthday of *the youngest child* (as opposed to the sixth birthday in general cases and the eighth in special cases).
- (3) Birth grant: a one-off payment on the birth of the child, the amount of which was 150% of the prevailing minimum old-age pension. Eligibility requirements included that the parent had to participate in at least four sessions of pre-natal care (one in the case of premature birth). Another minor change was that the cut-off point for applying was extended to 60 days (from 30 days) after the birth.

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<sup>17</sup> 'On the cusp of a new millennium: the government manifesto for a civic-minded Hungary, 1998–2002' ['Az új évezred küszöbén. Kormányprogram a polgári Magyarorszáért 1998–2002'].

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Quote from the 'reasons' section in Act LXXXIV of 1998.

- (4) Tax credits:<sup>21</sup> those who received family benefit were eligible for family tax credit (the difference being that tax credit was available from the 91st day after conception), which reduced the tax on the combined taxable income each month by a fixed amount for each dependent child (between HUF 1,700 and 2,600).
- (5) Insurance-related benefits: TES, GYED. No changes in the conditions for TES (180 days of insured status in the two years preceding childbirth). GYED<sup>22</sup> was a benefit provided after TES ran out and until the child turned two; it amounted to 70% of the previous average daily income, but could be no more than double the amount of the minimum wage. Either parent was eligible to apply. GYED was subject to tax and pension contributions. It was unusual in the sense that, even though it counted as a social security benefit, the money was paid from the central state budget into the health insurance fund (an arrangement that is still in place).
- (6) Assistance-type provision: the previous regular child protection benefit<sup>23</sup> was renamed 'supplementary family benefit' as of 1 January 2001. This is how the government intended to compensate those needy people who could not take advantage of family tax credit because of their low income. The amount was initially 20% of the minimum old-age pension, but was later set at a fixed amount.
- (7) A regulation providing equal opportunity was the 2002 amendment to the Labour Code, by which the father became entitled to five days' holiday, during which an 'absence fee' was paid to him.

Motions for amendments from the opposition:

Several amendment proposals, mainly from the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), were submitted to increase family benefit – either by a certain amount or else having it adjusted in line with inflation or the minimum wage. The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) objected to having family benefit split in two, saying that the benefit was intended to provide help in caring for children, regardless of whether or not they went to school.

Though not exactly as it was first proposed by the Free Democrats, a measure to introduce a supplementary family benefit was also accepted. This benefit was to be granted to people whose low incomes prevented them from taking advantage of the personal income tax credit. The proposals that related to GYED and GYES also sought to bring the amounts closer to the minimum wage and backed the extension of the eligibility period (to three years for GYED) using the following argument: 'This is a more favourable solution for both the child and the parent, and is also, incidentally, a step towards consistency in terms of family support. We have good reason to believe that there will be a substantial increase in the need for institutions that accept children who have just turned two, and this will require additional significant developments. Another reason for the proposal is that, once the child turns two, the parent has to make the decision whether to send the child to nursery school or apply for GYES, the amount of which is lower than GYED.'<sup>24</sup>

Instead, the government supported those proposals that sought to tackle certain difficulties that could arise from specific circumstances – e.g. a mother would be counted as a single parent if the father was doing his compulsory military service; a higher amount of family benefit would be paid for a child with a disability, so long as the disability could be proved by medical records; foster parents would also be eligible for birth grant. The government also gave its backing to a proposal that the state budget should assume the payment of certain contributions payable on receipt of GYES and GYED (e.g. health-care contribution).

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21 Act LXV of 1998 as the amendment to Act CXVII of 1995 on the income tax.

22 Act XCVII of 1999 on the amendments related to the introduction of the childcare benefit.

23 Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship.

24 Motion T/1280/14 for amendment was submitted by Mrs Sándorné Szabó, Dr Mihály Kökény and Dr Tibor Schvarcz.

Effects:

- Albeit at a lower rate than under the previous administration, child poverty increased because the amount of family benefit did not rise and so its purchasing power dropped by a third, while poorer families (17% of all households) could not rely on the tax credit (Gábos and Tóth 2001).
- Willingness to have children increased, primarily in the upper income category of society (this corresponded to the aim included in the government programme).
- The increase in the proportion of part-time working was nominal.
- Splitting family benefit in two did not encourage the schooling of school-aged children, as had been expected.<sup>25</sup>

#### 'WELFARE REGIME CHANGE'<sup>26</sup> – FAMILY POLICY OF THE MEDGYESSY GOVERNMENT (2002–04)

The Medgyessy administration announced the 'welfare regime change' programme, relying on the 'increasing performance of the economy'. The first stage was the so-called '100-day programme', which analysts believe was a purely political, popularity-seeking package, rather motivated by pangs of conscience over the Bokros Package.<sup>27</sup> The principle was (social) modernization and the target group was the entire population. The programme was not directed at reducing poverty and creating equal opportunity, but rather outlined *general welfare, social policy goals*. It emphasized that protection of the institution of the family required a complex system of measures: 'there is work to do on income policy, employment policy, housing policy and education policy – on almost every single aspect of social life'.

At the same time, the government was bound by its signature on the Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) in 2003 and the priorities outlined in the National Action Plan,<sup>28</sup> which included promoting female employment and a more effective balance between family life and work as an investment for the future, i.e. providing for child welfare in its broadest sense. All these required more money and more in-kind family benefits, the development of child welfare basic benefits, an increase in the number of available places in nursery schools and kindergartens, the development of family and child support guarantees, and free textbooks and school meals.

The amendment of 2002 was actually more of a clarification: a shift in emphasis and a 'correction' of the measures taken by the previous government. The key elements in such a correction were the restoration of the unity of family benefit (i.e. the elimination of the schooling benefit); a 20% increase in the amount of family benefit; the introduction of a 13th monthly family benefit; double GYES (both the amount and the term) for having twins; an increase in the amount of birth grant from 150% to 225% of the minimum old-age pension; and, within the framework of equal opportunity, making grandparents, too, eligible for GYES. These measures greatly increased central budget expenditure (by HUF 40 billion) and did boost the government's popularity; but they did not modify the system in line with the values expressed. Minister Judit Csehák did, however, refer to some new policy directions that went beyond correction:

- *A reduction in child poverty* – the government was to use family benefit as the one and only instrument.
- Even though many recognized the need to *eliminate* (or at least *mitigate*) *negative redistribution* (Mózer 2001), no such action was taken.
- *Recognition of childcare as work*: 'Social recognition of the work invested in caring and educating children is more than justified. Thus, it is our resolute intention to create, in the coming years, the conditions for balancing the extra work in rearing children with activities in the workplace. By doing so, we plan to offer a real chance for women who want to

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25 Yet there is no data available to support this argument. Only opposition speeches make such references and it is a logical conclusion, since there was no legal sanction against any parent who kept their child away from school (the family benefit could not be withdrawn).

26 'Action now and for everyone!' ['Cselekedni most és mindenkéért!'] – the programme of the government of the national centre-ground and the democratic coalition.

27 Lajos Bokros – finance minister in the Horn administration (1995–96). The package named after him was a series of austerity measures, introduced while he was in charge of the ministry.

28 'Nemzeti cselekvési terv a társadalmi összetartozásért'.

have children, for parents or relatives caring for little children, so that they can decide to have children without having to give up their dreams and without the risk of poverty.’ (Later this goal was to vanish without trace: no amendment was forthcoming, but it was a good indication of the rhetoric common to the political left and right.)

According to the minister, the criteria for judging the success of the programme were as follows: ‘Our family policy can become really successful if more people decide to have children and if the decision to have children no longer carries the risk of poverty.’ This is again an example of overlapping rhetoric on the right and the left of the political spectrum.

Objections from the opposition, motions for amendment:

- The key counter-argument was that, as things stood, the system increased the dependence of those living off aids and benefits.
- There was insufficient help available to those returning from GYES and GYED to the labour market.
- The needy did not get enough support, as the supplementary family benefit was not enough.
- The opposition agreed with increasing family benefit and introducing a 13th month, but believed the amount to be inadequate.
- An amendment to the Act would allow for further development of the benefit system; therefore, it recommended extending GYED from the current two years to three.
- It submitted a proposal for fathers to receive 10 days’ paid parental leave on the birth of their child, the state to assume the cost (rather than the employer).
- It recommended an increase in the amount of GYES and GYED.
- It believed coordinated, consensus-based, long-term regulation was needed to increase willingness to have children.
- The opposition sought a system that contributed to an increase in births and also to a reduction in child poverty (the decision to have children should be a social investment). This is how a motion for amendment was prepared to create a child-friendly social environment (new benefits recommended: support for newly-weds, travel subsidy for mothers-to-be, and an increase in the amount of GYED; this opposition proposal had high-status Budapest families as the target group).
- It recommended state regulation of within-family transfers (e.g. that tax payers’ contributions could be used to raise their parents’ old-age pensions).

To summarize this brief period, no new elements appeared in the family support system, either in terms of values or measures. There were only a handful of (albeit trenchant) criticisms levelled at the ‘perverse redistribution’ of the previous administration. Based on all this, the family policy of the Medgyessy administration may be dubbed a *family policy of correction*: having discovered the issues, it lacked the courage to follow through with decisions.

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## EIGHT OF THE 100 STEPS – THE FAMILY POLICY OF THE FIRST GYURCSÁNY ADMINISTRATION (2004–06)

In 2004, Ferenc Gyurcsány formed a government in the second half of the parliamentary term. The government manifesto – entitled ‘New Dynamism for Hungary!’ (‘Lendületben az ország!’) – included the ‘100 steps’ programme, which contained eight steps aimed at creating a ‘fair family benefit system’.

The package included two specific goals:

- (1) Improvements in the employment chances of those returning from GYES and GYED to the labour market: ‘The situation of young couples with children is improved by offering a 50% discount in contributions to those employers who employ mothers returning from GYES and GYED. Another help to them is that the employer does not have to pay the full itemized healthcare contribution for those working part time, but only the amount proportionate to their working hours.’
- (2) Reduction of tax credits: ‘It is unjustifiable that those who are not in need still receive tax credits. We are thus limiting the opportunity of those with the highest incomes to use the various tax exemptions to reduce the amount of personal income tax they pay. In future, these exemptions will not be available to those with an annual income of HUF 6 million, except for those rearing three or more children or children with disabilities. By doing so, we are taking a major step towards a more just and fair general and proportionate sharing of taxation.’

The amendments went some way to addressing these two goals<sup>29</sup> – and to some extent even went a step further.

The elements included:

- The amount of family benefit was almost doubled.
- Family tax credit was discontinued for those rearing one or two children; the HUF 6 million ceiling for families with three (or more) children remained; above that limit, tax credit was reduced.
- The regular child protection benefit was integrated into the amount of the family benefit, and its function was assumed by the regular child protection allowance (meaning allowances for meals, schooling, etc. for those needy families where the per capita income did not exceed the minimum wage: the local government town clerk would issue a certificate to that effect).
- While receiving GYES, mothers could go back to work full time after their child’s first birthday; GYES was made tax exempt for working women, but was added to the taxable income.
- When calculating the amount of regular social assistance, the family was taken as a consumption unit (each family member had a different multiplier): ‘What this means is that decisions as to eligibility are made on the basis not of per capita income but of the consumption unit, and this is how the amount of subsidy is determined. The allowance is not a fixed amount, but tops the actual family income up to the eligible income ceiling (90% of the minimum old-age pension). Accordingly, the amount of assistance is highest for the poorest families and is reduced as we get closer to the income ceiling.’<sup>30</sup>

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29 Act CXXVI of 2005 on reform of the family welfare system; Act CLXX of 2005 on the amendment of Act III of 1993 on social administration and social assistance.

30 Act CLXX of 2005 on the amendment of Act III of 1993 on social administration and social assistance.



In order to meet EU expectations, the minister singled out day care and, more specifically, support for day care centres as one of the goals.

Opposition objections:

According to the conservative system of values, it is better for the state, families, women and children alike if the mother rears the children at home for as long as possible (one specific motion for amendment was to increase the GYES and GYED period to five years and increase the amount of GYES payable) because population growth is in everyone's interests. As a social policy goal, conservatives consider household-based assistance to be important. More broadly, the family should be treated as a unit (including, for instance, by the tax system) and the welfare system should encourage employment. According to the opposition, it was hard to interpret the issue of child poverty in isolation from the poverty of families. As a possible solution they supported the introduction of family-based taxation, on the one hand, and an increase in the amount of GYES, on the other.

The restructuring of the value and terminology system of the left-wing government had resulted in a sort of 'duality' in terms of the family benefit system: on the one hand, compared to the Horn government it had slowly moved into social policy, in terms of both its measures and its goals ('Thus, I am definitely of the opinion that family policy is a measure to manage poverty');<sup>31</sup> on the other hand, it becomes clear that family support cannot be simply state aid, because it serves overall social and demographic aims ('each and every child is equally important'). This latter goal is acknowledged by, among other things, a significant increase in the amount of family benefit. The social policy interpretation is clearly visible in the 2005 amendment to the Social Act, which now includes household-based social assistance (defined in terms of 'consumption units'). According to the government, this eliminates any inequalities that remain after the universal family benefit.

'A major philosophical question is how the government should treat children – not differentiating between them and considering them to be equally important, yet attempting to provide more support for those children who live in the worst circumstances. Together with my minister, I believe that the solution is closely related to the system of social provision, and thereby to the thought and effort that is required to reshape the system of social assistance as rapidly as possible: to provide it with a child-oriented dimension – whether or not there is a child present in a family – and to try to redesign and rethink the system in terms of consumption units.'<sup>32</sup>

Presumed effects of the family policy elements of the 100 steps programme:

- It favoured poorer households and, more specifically, those families with children (yet, a quarter of the support still went to the wealthiest third of society).
- According to a microsimulation impact analysis (Benedek and Scharle 2006), the income of people with children grew faster than that of people with no children in every single income decile.
- Families with several children benefited more (benefits differentiated on the basis of the number of children reach the poor even if eligibility is not linked to income).
- The elements related to the tax and benefit system favour the poorest families with children and the wealthiest households (Benedek and Scharle 2006).
- Allowing parents to work (and pay taxes and contributions) at the same time as they receive GYES is expected to make

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31 By Pálné Hermányi, expert consultant on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, during the debate on the bill. The minister in question was Kinga Göncz.

32 By Gabriella Béki (SZDSZ), extract from the parliamentary debate on the bill.

this provision cost-neutral for the state budget and complies with EU requirements, since it encourages employment; yet, with this amendment GYES lost its original function as paid maternity leave and became merely a social transfer.

- Integrating the regular child protection benefit into family benefit does not impact on willingness to work, as it is paid regardless of whether or not the parents work.
- In this form, social assistance discourages employment (more than one person may be eligible for it in the same family, and in certain cases a higher income may be realized from welfare than from work).

#### **‘COMBATING CHILD POVERTY’:<sup>33</sup> THE FAMILY POLICY OF THE SECOND GYURCSÁNY ADMINISTRATION (2006–08)<sup>34</sup>**

The relevant section of the government programme is close to that of the Medgyessy government, and it adopts wholesale a number of its elements (welfare changes, social solidarity, family and child support providing security, etc.). One of its strategic areas is the elimination of child poverty, and it aims to accomplish that within 25 years; thus, family policy is transformed into child policy. Advocates of the programme consider the regular in kind benefits for child protection, the renewal of child welfare services and the assistance for parents to get work to be the most effective means of reducing child poverty. In addition, day care for small children is receiving more attention as a way of increasing the opportunities for the mother and the child – there have been proposals to organize such day care in a broader and more economic (i.e. integrated) way.<sup>35</sup> Thus family policy focuses on a single target group: poor children. The government programme provides no reason as to why only poor children are worthy of support; but in the sense of creating consensus among the various competing interests, it would appear to be a good choice. It is a matter of perspective, and time will tell whether a programme that encourages (indeed requires) cooperation between the various sectors tackles the issue – or whether it will rather have the effect of deflecting responsibility and leaving a policy area ownerless.

Changes that came into effect on 1 January 2007, following the 2006 amendment to the Social Act:<sup>36</sup>

- GYES and regular social assistance cannot be paid together.
- Part of the regular social assistance may be given as a service in kind.
- The amount of family benefit was increased in line with inflation (6.5%).
- A new rule was introduced: social assistance tops up family income only to a certain income level (only one person per family is entitled to regular social assistance, thus eliminating the unwanted factor of disincentive to work).

Changes that came into effect in June 2007:

- The family support is no longer administered by employers (as was the case at some large firms).
- Family benefit was increased in line with inflation (4.5%).
- The income ceiling for eligibility to receive regular child protection benefit was increased by 5%.

Changes to the Family Support Act led to the modification of the Social Act (and the latter depends on the State Budget Act). This fact clearly indicates that, according to the government, family policy is part of its social policy, and therefore its primary function is to aid people.

33 From ‘New Dynamism for Hungary’ – the programme of the government of the republic for a free and just Hungary, 2004–06.

34 This paper was originally published in 2008 and was not updated for the current publication. Hence it only covers changes up to late 2007.

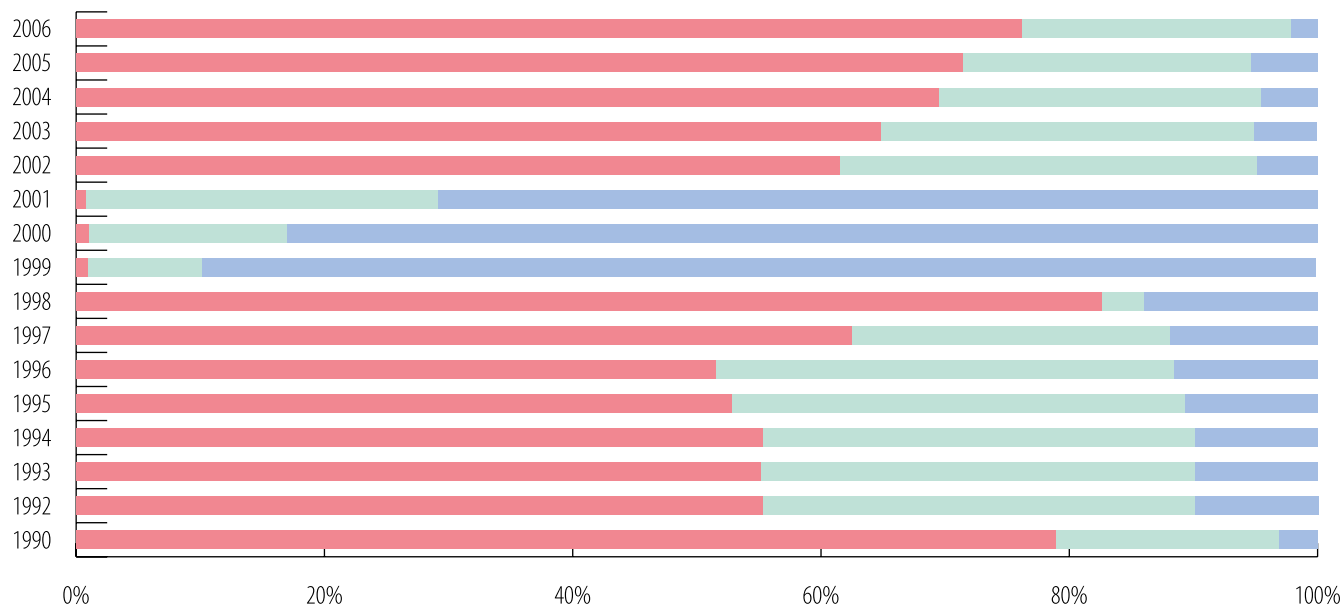
35 ‘Making it better for our children’ [‘Legyen jobb a gyermekeknek!’] – national strategy, 2007–35.

36 Act CXVII of 2006 on the amendment of certain social laws.

Objections from the opposition and the SZDSZ:

- The system does not treat families as 'grown-ups' (part of the assistance may be given in kind – i.e. the government is worried about giving money to poor families).
- The system encourages divorce (if couples divorce, both may be eligible for regular social assistance).
- The theoretical question was raised: which reduces poverty more – support given on the basis of fairness or on the basis of need? (The opposition says the latter.)
- Instead of reducing the amount of assistance, the minimum wage should be increased.
- The actions of the government appear to be 'reform anarchy', whereas they should be stable and foreseeable.
- The motions for amendments are prepared hastily and inconsistently: 'A clear declaration is needed as to whether closing the poverty gap and unifying our society is the real goal, or whether it is the view foisted on you by the liberals and Ferenc Gyurcsány that it is enough, for the sake of social peace, to simply aid those people who are of no use to the modern economy, the bottom third of society.'<sup>37</sup> The three values represented by the opposition are fairness, social cohesion and an increase in employment.

The effects are not yet very visible, yet it is clear that no major changes have been made to the system since 2002. The proportion of universal benefits is the highest; next come those linked to insured status; and bringing up the rear are those based on the principle of need (Figure 1). In terms of rhetoric, the principle of need receives most emphasis; but the actual measures are limited to tinkering in an effort to improve the targeting of benefits.



**Figure 1. Changes in the proportion of benefits by entitlement, 1990-2006**

Source: Based on Ignits and Kapitány (2006).

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37 By József Borsos during the speeches delivered by the chief speakers of the political factions on the motion debating amendment no. T/1305, on the amendment of certain laws on social affairs.

— universal support  
— employed parents  
— means tested

## SUMMARY

The dominance of monetary provision has not changed significantly since the regime change: no government since 1989 has exploited the opportunities offered by development of family support services (in fact, there has been a definite decline in nursery schools – whatever party has been in power: the number of institutions, their available capacity and the number of children enrolled have all steadily fallen). Unfortunately, to date researchers have failed to examine this field (the system of measures and the effects of services). An analysis of day care for children would be especially interesting from the perspective of reducing child poverty and increasing female employment.

Similarly, family policy provisions have only recently been evaluated from the perspective of employment policy. One of the goals to emerge is to ensure that assistance-type provisions do not discourage employment; yet there are few practical initiatives to this end.

Nor has any government done very much to create equal opportunities for women and men in terms of childcare.

The development and modification of family policy benefits are less directed towards increasing the fertility rate (no longer an exclusive goal of family policy in any European country), because the two political camps perceive only one way of doing that – by significantly increasing benefit amounts, which is not a feasible option in the current economic climate. Instead, what we see is a narrowing of the target group receiving support. More recently, efforts appear to have been concentrated on the issue of child poverty, which is hard to grasp statistically but is an excellent issue on which to rally unified support from professionals (cf. Spéder and Monostori 2001).

The financial resources that back social policy and family policy come from taxes and social security contributions. On the question of financing aid and benefits, a certain tendency is much in evidence: whereas payments during the socialist era were largely based on the social security fund (also, incidentally, typical of the conservative welfare state of Esping-Andersen), more recently they have been tax based, i.e. from the state budget. This means that the current condition of the economy dictates the level of family support provisions. Professionals and politicians alike are bemused and disturbed at the concomitant of this – that the Social Act changes every time the Budget Act changes, i.e. at least twice a year. Since its enactment, the Social Act has been amended over 40 times and has sometimes affected the system of family benefits, which really requires stability.

The differences and similarities in the selection of values, goals and measures by left-wing and right-wing governments form the focus of this study. And here the following observations can be made. Right-wing governments set demographic goals and champion the conservative family model openly and consistently (and have moulded their system of goals and measures to reflect this – i.e. the measures are mostly value rational). However, left-wing governments have tended to adjust their value selection to economic exigencies and rational goals (target rational measures).

If we draw up a balance-sheet of the family policies of the various administrations, we see that two periods were consistent in terms of their goals, measures, values, effects and side-effects: the first was the Horn government, with its family policy based on the principle of need; the second was the Orbán government, which targeted the middle class. Also, it was these two that stood the test of implementation; the explanation of the reasons behind this would require additional, contextual analysis.

However, at the level of rhetoric (as we saw above), we can discern a mixing of right-wing and left-wing systems of arguments: sometimes the very same goal is set by both parties, but within a different value context. One example of this would

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be the effort to extend the GYES and GYED period and to increase the amounts. Either side has its own perspective on this: on the one hand, if mothers stayed at home, that would supposedly increase the fertility rate<sup>38</sup> (a right-wing value); on the other hand, it costs the state budget more to fund nursery schools and family day-care centres than to pay out aid (left-wing rhetoric). The reason why GYES and GYED have not yet been expanded and increased probably has to do with EU directives or a hidden consensus. The question is when this pressure from the European Union (which most likely does facilitate system stability) is adopted openly as a value and in what context (or by which side).

In other words, which side will be the first to realize that family policy implies not just state expenditure to reduce poverty, and that its system of goals and effects goes beyond increasing fertility rates? Finally, for the sake of clarity, [Table 2](#) summarizes the typical values, goals, measures and effects of the various political administrations.

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38 Not supported by international evidence.

Parliamentary cycle	Value, priority	Target system	Key measures	Effects, side-effects
1. Antall government	Development of a conservative, patriarchal family model	Population policy	Increasing the amount of the family benefit, GYET, maternity benefits are linked to insured status	Fertility rate did not increase; discourages employment among the middle class; steady effect on reducing poverty; substantial expenditure from the state budget
2. Horn government	Support only for the needy	Social policy	Provisions dependent on income	Reduced state budget expenditures (not significantly); significant decline in the fertility rate; social policy was shaped by the situation of the state budget (residual principle) instead of the needs of the needy
3. Orbán government	Support for the middle class	Population policy	Universal provisions: family tax credit is the most emphasized element	Inequalities in income and child poverty increased; the middle class more willing to have children
4a. Medgyessy government	General welfare goals	Social policy	Increasing the amount of family benefit	Increasing expenditures from the state budget; increasing popularity; increasing social inequality
4b. Gyurcsány government	Reduction in social inequalities	Social policy, societal policy employment policy	Increasing the amount of family benefit; reduction of tax credit; household-based social assistance; encouragement to work while receiving GYES	Mostly the income of the poorest and the richest households with children increased; household-based social assistance discourages employment
5. Gyurcsány government	Reduction in child poverty	Social policy	Coordination of assistance-type child support benefits	?

**Table 2. The balance of the systems of family benefits according to their values, goals and effects**

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## APPENDIX

### Changes in the main family benefits and allowances, by parliamentary cycle

in 1990	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	Cycle 5
<i>Name:</i> family tax credit <i>Term:</i> up to the 14 <sup>th</sup> birthday of the child <i>Amount:</i> fixed	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility conditions:</i> eligibility for family benefit, up to the 6 <sup>th</sup> birthday of the child <i>Amount:</i> fixed	<i>Name:</i> - <i>Eligibility conditions:</i> - <i>Amount:</i> -	<i>Name:</i> family tax credit <i>Eligibility condition:</i> family benefit <i>Amount:</i> fixed	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> large families, income based <i>Amount:</i> NC	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> NC <i>Amount:</i> NC
<i>Name:</i> birth grant <i>Eligibility condition:</i> insured status <i>Term:</i> one-off payment <i>Amount:</i> fixed	<i>Name:</i> pregnancy benefit <i>Eligibility condition:</i> universal <i>Term:</i> starting in the 4 <sup>th</sup> month of the pregnancy <i>Amount:</i> equal to family benefit	<i>Name:</i> birth grant <i>Eligibility condition:</i> universal <i>Term:</i> one-off payment <i>Amount:</i> 150% of the min. old-age pension	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> NC <i>Term:</i> NC <i>Amount:</i> NC	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> NC <i>Term:</i> NC <i>Amount:</i> 225% of the min. old-age pension	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> NC <i>Term:</i> NC <i>Amount:</i> NC
<i>Name:</i> family benefit <i>Eligibility condition:</i> universal <i>Term:</i> up to the 16 <sup>th</sup> birthday of the child. <i>Amount:</i> increased with the number of children up to 3, then fixed	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> NC <i>Term:</i> NC <i>Amount:</i> NC	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> income-based <i>Term:</i> NC <i>Amount:</i> NC	<i>Name:</i> education benefit <i>Eligibility condition:</i> universal <i>Term:</i> up to the 20 <sup>th</sup> birthday of the child <i>Amount:</i> NC	<i>Name:</i> family benefit <i>Eligibility condition:</i> NC <i>Term:</i> 23 years of age <i>Amount:</i> NC	<i>Name:</i> NC <i>Eligibility condition:</i> NC <i>Term:</i> NC <i>Amount:</i> NC

Notes: By amount we mean the principle used to define the amount.  
NC = no change compared to the previous parliamentary cycle.



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in 1990	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	Cycle 5
Name: extended paren- tal leave (GYES) <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: insured  status</i> <i>Term: after GYED,  up to the 3rd  birthday of the  child</i> <i>Amount: a fixed  amount based  on the number of  children</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: NC</i> <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC +  supplementary  income</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: no insured  status required  but income  based</i> <i>Term: 3 years of  age</i> <i>Amount: equal to  the min. old-age  pension</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: universal</i> <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: NC</i> <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: NC</i> <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC</i>
Name: - Eligibility condi- tion: - Term: - Amount: -	Name: child raising support (GYET) <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: insured  status, 3 or more  children, income  based</i> <i>Term: from the  3<sup>rd</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup>  birthday of the  youngest child.</i> <i>Amount: min. old-  age pension</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: no insured  status required  but income  based</i> <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC</i>	Name: NC Eligibility condi- tion: universal <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: NC</i> <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC</i>	Name: NC <i>Eligibility condi-  tion: NC</i> <i>Term: NC</i> <i>Amount: NC</i>

Notes: By amount we mean the principle used to define the amount.  
NC = no change compared to the previous parliamentary cycle.



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in 1990	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	Cycle 5
Name: maternity leave (TES) Eligibility condition: insured status Term: 24 weeks Amount: income based, certain % of income	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: NC	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: NC	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: NC	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: NC	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: NC
Name: parental leave (GYED) Eligibility condition: insured status Term: 2 years Amount: income based, certain % of income	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: maximum set	Name: - Eligibility condition: - Term: - Amount: -	Name: GYED Eligibility condition: insured status Term: 2 years Amount: 70% of income with ceiling value set	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: NC	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Term: NC Amount: NC
Name: - Eligibility condition: - Amount: -	Name: - Eligibility condition: - Amount: -	Name: regular child protection allowance (RGYT) Eligibility condition: income-based Amount: 20% of the min. old-age pension	Name: supplementary family benefit Eligibility condition: income and wealth test Amount: fixed	Name: regular child protection allowance Eligibility condition: NC Amount: NC	Name: NC Eligibility condition: NC Amount: NC

Notes: By amount we mean the principle used to define the amount.  
NC = no change compared to the previous parliamentary cycle.

Sources: Ignits and Kapitány (2006), Bálint and Köllő (2008).

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## INTRODUCTION

Social policy literature on “Eastern” Europe<sup>2</sup> still struggles with the question, of whether the systems that developed there throughout the 1990s can be called “post-Communist welfare regimes”. The most important features common to the transition that Central and Eastern European countries underwent are: processes of economic and political restructuring that lasted a decade; unemployment and inactivity rates that grew rapidly until 1997; all of this lead to social problems, i.e. most of all, poverty amongst a large section of the previously employed population. The varied responses of the welfare systems in the Central and Eastern European countries did not lead to consistent and “settled” approaches to the social problems in any of these situations. Thus, they did not form a clear, new, and distinguished type of welfare state. However, it may also be the case that researchers have not yet grasped these features. An American political scientist, Tomasz Inglot, recently argued that there is indeed such a thing as a Central and Eastern European welfare state, and its most important, common institutional pattern has been “emergency decision making” (cf. Inglot 2008).

A number of authors have already described the gender regimes that developed in the region (cf. Fodor 2006; Pascall/Kwak 2005), and there have been several attempts to compare the gendered aspects of social policies, especially family policies, in the post-Communist countries (Saxonberg 2000; Haney 2002; Szelewa/Polakowski 2008). The attitudes of citizens of these countries concerning the gendered division of paid and unpaid labour seem to be more conservative in nature when compared to the attitudes in “Western” European countries. For example, even in 2002 more than half of the population in both Poland and in Hungary thought that: “a preschool child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works” (Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung 2002). Despite the high employment rates of women under Communism, patriarchal relations within the family remained untouched, and conservative attitudes towards female and male roles tend to change slowly. These combined factors then provide a common ground for a “post-Communist gender regime”. In this paper I argue that despite the similarities summarized above, different patterns of welfare regime development can be observed across different Central and Eastern European countries. The questions I attempt to answer in relation to Polish and Hungarian family policies are the following:

1. What are the similarities and the differences between the family policy regimes in Hungary and Poland?
2. What are the reasons for those similarities and differences?
3. What are the effects of differing patterns of family policies?

1 This paper was first published in Diana Auth, Eva Buchholz, Stefanie Janczyk (eds.): *Selektive Emanzipation: Analyse zur Gleichstellungs- und Familienpolitik*. [Politik und Geschlecht, Band 21] Verlag Barbara Budrich, Opladen & Farmington Hills, MI, 2010. pp. 239–254. <http://www.budrich-verlag.de/pages/details.php?ID=353>

Certain parts are built upon the author’s earlier work with Dorota Szelewa and Béla Tomka (cf. Szikra and Szelewa 2008, Szikra and Tomka 2009).

2 The term “Eastern Europe” is a politically constructed concept. This is why I put the term “Eastern” into quotation marks when first used. At other times I use the term “postcommunist”, which again, is a misleading term, but is probably the most widely used in the “Western” world.

## FAMILY POLICY REGIMES IN POLAND AND HUNGARY

Family policies in the two countries can best be labelled as either constituting “familialistic” or “maternalistic” regimes. Caring for children, the elderly and the disabled is work that is overwhelmingly provided by the families, in particular women, and there is no policy that explicitly encourages men to share such responsibilities. Furthermore, despite accession to the EU in 2004, there has been no major breakthrough in policies for the equal treatment of men and women in the workplace, and there is little support enabling women to return (or get access) to the labour market before their children turn the age of three. A common feature of Polish and Hungarian family policies is the scarcity of services for children under the age of two and a half to three years. Even so there is a major difference whereby in Hungary the state provides financial support for parents who stay at home with their small children until the age of three (starting in 2010, this will be provided until the age of two), whereas in Poland such support is only offered during the first few months of the children’s lives.

Following the “familialism” typology by Leitner (2003; cf. also Leitner in this volume) [Table 1], Szelewa and Polakowski (2008) analysed family policies in the post-Communist countries. They included both payments and services in their quantitative (fuzzy-set) analysis and came to the conclusion that different “faces of familialisms” can be distinguished in the region

Familialisation of care (State pays for care provided by the family)	De-familialisation of care (State pays for care provided outside the home: Childcare services)	
	Strong	Weak
Strong	<i>optional familialism (HUNGARY)</i>	<i>explicit familialism</i>
Weak	<i>de-familialisation</i>	<i>implicit familialism (POLAND)</i>

**Table 1. Categorization of Care Policies**

Source: Leitner 2003: 358

Polish family policies represent the ideal-type of “implicit familialism”. According to Leitner’s definition: “‘implicit familialism’ means that the state neither offers de-familialisation nor actively supports the caring function of the family through any kind of familialistic policy [...] the family will be the primary caretaker since there are no alternatives at hand” (Leitner 2003: 359). In Poland, parental leave and family allowance are restricted to poor families, and only 40% of children are in kindergarten by the age of five (cf. Szikra/ Szelewa 2008) [Figure 1].

Hungary, in contrast, offers multi-layered support for families with children. Access to kindergarten and afternoon-care at schools is practically available to all children, and crèches/day care are also more commonly available than in Poland, although still only 10% of all children can be enrolled due to the overall lack of institutions. Two different forms of parental leave make it possible for parents to stay at home with children up to two years: One is earnings-related, the other one is lower and flat rate. Because of this choice between paid maternity leave and childcare services, we may call the Hungarian system “optional

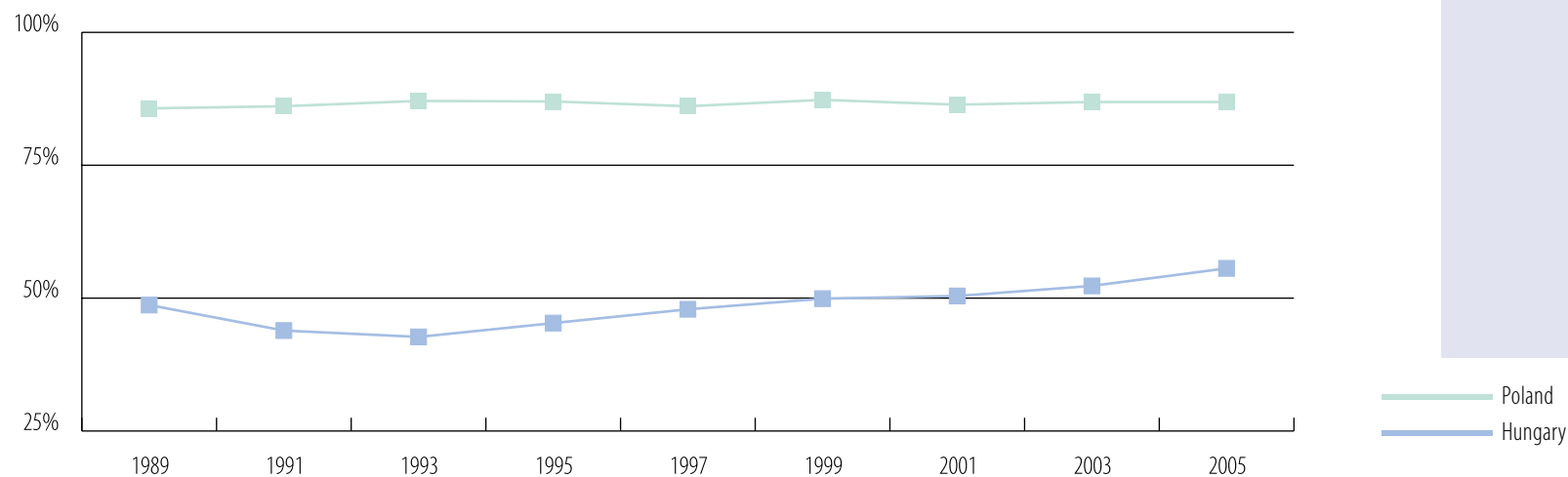
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*familialism*". However, the possibility of exercising one's choice is not equally enjoyed among all strata of society. Poor and especially Roma children are excluded from the better schools and extracurricular services, they are less present in kindergartens than non-Roma children when under the age of four, and only very few of them gain access to crèches. The reasons for this are many-fold: the Roma are overrepresented in the poorest regions of Hungary, where the previously existing sources of incomes (eg. heavy industry) have disappeared and the population has lived in conditions of harsh and persistent poverty since the mid-1980s. Discrimination against the Roma children in the kindergartens and in primary education is also widespread. This is partly attributable to an intentional process, driven by the – envisioned – interests of the local middle classes. The situation of mothers with good labour market records is much more favourable both in the case of transfer payments and in their access to services (cf. Szikra/ Szelewa 2008). Their children readily obtain access to crèches to a greater extent than the needy children. I would thus suggest to call the Hungarian system a "limited optional familialism".



**Figure 1. Net enrolment rates for children 3–6 (1989–2005)**

Source: TransMONEE-Database 2007

## THE ROOTS OF POLISH AND HUNGARIAN FAMILY POLICIES

### Early stages of development

The classical historical analysis of welfare state development (cf. Flora/Alber 1981; Swaan 1988; Inglot 2008) provides us with some answers to the question of why certain states choose one or another track for welfare development. Such analyses have in the last few years increasingly focused on Central and Eastern European countries (cf. Inglot 2008; Cerami/Vanhuyse 2009). The "mainstream" version of history, as highlighted by numerous feminist scholars, has focused on bread-winning men, as it concentrates on traditional forms of work-related social insurance schemes. Although it has rarely been the central focus of historical research, many working class women were affected by early social insurance legislation. In fact four weeks of

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maternity leave following childbirth was introduced as early as 1884 in Hungary as part of legislation directed at the newly emerging industrial sector. The first sickness insurance acts provided a right for care and medical assistance before and during child-birth and paid maternity leave for four to six weeks for the mothers in most countries, and this was the case in Hungary and Poland as well. The earliest versions of such legislation were enacted in 1891 in Hungary, and in the 1920s in Poland (right after the formation of the Polish state).

Hungary, by this time, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and, thus, was largely affected by legislation written in Austria and Germany (cf. Szikra 2004). Some of the services for children also followed the examples set by the “Western” neighbours. For instance, the Fröbel movement grew in popularity legislation for public kindergartens was issued as early as 1891. Public education, and within that, kindergartens, served important nationalist aims in the multi-ethnic Hungarian Kingdom. They were the primary means of spreading the Hungarian language and culture among the non-Hungarian speaking population throughout the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (cf. Bicskei 2006). An additional purpose that they served was to ease labour market participation for working class women as state-run kindergartens and kindergartens run by the biggest factories targeted female blue-collar workers.

In contrast, prior to 1918 Poland was split between the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Germany and Russia. In this way the territory that would later become the Polish state was affected by the legislation of three countries and developed mainly along the lines of at least two different “tracks” of welfare. Moreover, the territory of Poland was treated as a periphery by these countries and suffered from continuous under-investment. The formation of the independent State of Poland in 1918 provided the opportunity to introduce uniform social insurance legislation for industrial workers. This legislation was of central importance for the newly formed state (cf. Inglot 2008).

	Injuries	Sickness	Old age	Unemployment
Hungary	1907	1891	1928	1991
Poland	1924	1920	1927	1924

**Table 2. Introduction of compulsory social insurance schemes in Hungary and Poland**

*Source: Szikra and Tomka (2009) with modifications.*

The differences in the creation of the Polish and the Hungarian nation-states after the First World War have been crucial not only in the development of their social insurance legislation but also in terms of their family policies. The historical institutionalist approach (cf. Tilly 1984; Pierson/Skocpol 2002) can be well utilized here. Informed by this approach I argue that the ways in which these newly formed nation-states looked at the role of families and especially at mothers still has its effects on today’s arrangements. Hungary and Poland as nation-states were both created after the First World War. At the same time, the processes of their creation were radically different. Hungary started its existence as a nation-state which underwent the tragic process of losing most of the territories that had previously made up the Hungarian Kingdom; Poland, at the same time, was re-united, and went on to become a geographically and economically important player in the Eastern European region. These processes would ultimately affect the formation of the two countries’ public welfare arrangements.



After the First World War the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy came to an end and what had previously been the Hungarian Kingdom was punished through the forced partitioning off of two-third of its territories. The Treaty of Versailles after the War gave rise to new states like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup> The formation of Hungary as an ethnically homogeneous nation- state started with huge losses: several millions of ethnic Hungarians remained behind the borders and became part of Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In this country, the fear of the “disappearance of the nation” led to the emergence of maternalist policy measures in the 1930s and 1940s that were similar to those of other countries (cf. Koven/Michel 1993).<sup>4</sup> Women as mothers (or prospective mothers) were seen as the potential saviours of the nation, and as a consequence the conservative Hungarian governments issued pro-natalist policies. These policies were especially vivid after the outbreak of the Second World War. This created a chance for Hungary to re-gain the previously lost territories. Mothers and soldiers were thus at the forefront of state-run welfare policies (cf. Skocpol 1992). A system of family allowances was introduced as early as 1912 for civil servants and was extended in 1938 to factory workers (including female workers). Then in 1940 an extensive, means- and behaviour-tested loan system was established for the benefit of poor agricultural families with more than four children (cf. Szikra 2009). These measures were introduced at the expense of Jewish factory-owners and landowners from the late 1920s on, creating an anti-Semitic nationalistic family policy by the 1940s. The 1930s also witnessed the rapid expansion of kindergartens and afternoon services for children of factory workers. These services paved the way for what later developed into “optional familialistic” or “public maternalist” systems in Hungary (cf. Leitner 2003; Szikra/Szelewa 2009).

Contrary to what happened to Hungary, the Polish state began its existence with a unification process, defined not by a loss of territories but by a creative period and growth. A new, integrated society was to be created from the formerly partitioned areas. Differences in laws, administrations, and practices had to be “smoothed out” and “eventually made uniformly and widely acceptable” (Stachura 2004: 48). The newly established state administration was preoccupied with investing in industry, and much of its (financial and administrative) efforts were concentrated from 1936 on towards the creation of the Central Industrial Region (ibid: 47). This also meant that in the realm of social policy emphasis was placed on social insurance. The compulsory and unified social insurance system was a significant achievement for the newly established Polish state. At the time of its creation the German and Austrian partitioned areas served as examples to follow. The newly established system could not provide less than what had been achieved by the previous administration.

The factors that kept Poles together in the times of the partition were the Polish language, culture, and, more importantly, the Catholic Church. In this way, Polish nationalism has always been inseparable from the Catholic Church. Because of the interwoven nature of the state formation process and Catholicism, the traditional Catholic views about the family and motherhood greatly influenced public policies. Here, family life was treated as a “sacred” and private matter. The fight over public education and within that, kindergarten and other childcare services, was won by the Church (cf. Morgan 2007). Public investment into childcare facilities was almost nonexistent, and the state did not create its own family policy, as was the case in Hungary. It did not interfere with the “private” sphere of the family, the protection of which was the primary task of the Church. At the same time, the rhetoric about the “mother Pole” was very much present in the time period between the two World Wars, creating a paradoxical situation wherein the “saviours of the nation” (Davis 1997) were actually left alone to the completion of their caring tasks. All in all, family policies played only a marginal role in the newly formed state (cf. Szikra/Szelewa 2009). “Implicit familialism” where the state does not create explicit family policies placing instead the burden of care on families (cf. Leitner 2003) remained a long lasting feature of the Polish state.

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3 Commonly called as the “Treaty of Trianon” in Hungary, commonly remembered as one of the big “traumas” of the Hungarian nation.

4 A very similar process is described by Marilyn Lake (1993: 378–379) in the case of Australia: The sense of vulnerability and the “struggle for greatness” lead to numerous maternalist measures after the turn of the last century, one example is the introduction of maternal allowance. These measures were provided to the non-Native population, and served not only pro-natalist but to some extent eugenic aims.



## Family policies under Communism

Two periods can be distinguished under Communism with respect to the generosity of social policies. These differ substantially in terms of the levels of social provision, the universality of the system, and with respect to the social rights that were provided to the citizens. The first period lasted from the early years of Communism until the mid- or late- 1960s, with the second period spanning from the late 1960s until the fall of the Communist system. A more universal set of welfare policies can be observed in the second period, when generous family policies were also developed.

Following a short democratic period between 1945 and 1948 both countries became Communist dictatorships where the roles of social policy and social work became marginalized. The idea behind this marginalization was that the centrally planned economy would reduce poverty and class differences, and, thus, there would be no need for independent welfare institutions. With a forceful push towards industrialization, masses of women were driven into the labour market, and the full employment of both men and women became a main goal of the regimes. At the same time, very little effort was made in the field of welfare policy during the 1950s. Social insurance was extended to most of the agricultural workers but not to all of them, and throughout the whole period lower benefits were provided for agricultural workers than for industrial workers.<sup>5</sup> Family allowances were extended in Hungary but were not made universal; in Poland they were introduced for the first time in 1948 but were made means tested from the very beginning, providing assistance only for the poorest of the poor. Kindergartens and crèches were built in both countries, but contrary to the propaganda at the time, the majority of them were created not by the central state, but by factories and local communities with very little or no central subsidies (cf. Bicskei 2006). Early Communist family policies were restrictive in both countries, with low state subsidies for childcare institutions and restrictive legislation on abortion.

The 1956 Revolution in Hungary and uprisings in Poland around the same time marked a change in welfare policies as well. A “hidden contract” between the state and the citizens was formulated in Hungary after the Revolution: social rights were extended to larger parts of the population, and new forms of welfare transfers introduced. In Poland “emergency actions” (Inglot 2008) were taken, and social insurance payments were extended. A very good example for this policy change is the system of extended parental leave, introduced in the late 1960s in both Hungary and Poland. The former system of four and later six weeks of maternity leave still remained in place after the introduction of the newly extended schemes. In Hungary parental leave was paid and was available to all working mothers for two and a half, and later three years. Long parental leave was unpaid in Poland until 1981. At the same time, parental leave was income tested from the very beginning in Poland (cf. Szikra/Szelewa 2009). Income testing set Poland apart from other Communist countries as this was an unusual means of defining eligibility in these states.

Long parental leave was also significant in the sense that it represented a slight turn away from the earlier policies that were designed to drive women into the labour market. Providing the leave option exclusively for mothers (and not for fathers) clearly shows that the regime wanted to stress the traditional roles of men and women in the family and broke with the initial Marxist idea of freeing women from domestic work. On the other hand, the fact that a long parental leave was an option and not an obligation, created considerable freedom for women in this region, especially in those countries where childcare facilities became increasingly accessible. This may be termed “*optional familialism*” a concept that arose in Hungary in its purest form, following the earlier family policies that were described in the previous section. Poland, however, to a great extent still left caring tasks to family members. Nor did the state provide financial support for mothers (long paid maternity leave).

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<sup>5</sup> This only changed with Act II. 1975 in Hungary. In Poland, land ownership was allowed, but land owners were excluded from certain social insurance rights.

The earlier mentioned concept of “*implicit familism*” in Poland continued under Communism. This is illustrated by the fact that 85.7% of three to six year-old Hungarian children attended kindergartens in 1989, whereas only 48.7% of Polish children in the same age group did [Figure 1]. The attendance in crèches was 12-13% in Hungary (not as high as state propaganda would have suggested), but in Poland it was just around 4% in the same year (cf. Darvas 2000). A common feature of the Polish and the Hungarian system was the lack of possibilities for working part-time, and in certain sectors of the economy there was little chance of returning to work before children reached the age of three. Because family relations remained patriarchal, it was mostly women who had to take on the double burden of full-time paid work which was typically in the state sector and unpaid care work at home.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN POLISH AND HUNGARIAN FAMILY POLICIES

In the early 1990s an explicit maternalist discourse prevailed in both countries which was aimed at encouraging the withdrawal of mothers from the labour market in times of growing unemployment. This was presented by the political elite and often perceived by mothers themselves as a long awaited return to the “real” duties of women (cf. Fodor et al. 2002). Nevertheless, contrary to the rhetoric, no substantial changes in the family-based transfers and the structure of services could be observed in the early 1990s in Hungary. Later, a more diverse discourse evolved supported by the accession process to the EU, which stressed gender mainstreaming and aimed at increasing the rates of female employment. The tradition of “implicit familism” in Poland has persisted since the fall of Communism (cf. Szelewa/Polakowski 2008). Means testing was extended yet most of the payments were restricted to only the poorest families. Nonetheless, crèches are almost non-existent, and only half of the three to six year-old children are in kindergartens. The overall reliance on private familial care in Poland is referred to as “private maternalism” by other authors (cf. Fodor et al. 2002). In contrast, in Hungary, all children above five years of age are required by law to attend kindergartens. Despite that only 10% of children under the age of three are in crèches, where long waiting lists are evidence of high demand. The complex system of long maternity and parental leaves, inherited from Communism, and the relatively high level and availability of childcare institutions targeted at specific sectors of society and certain age groups of children can still be labelled “optional familism” (cf. Szelewa/Polakowski 2008), the roots of which date back to the late 1960s. The discrimination of Roma and poor children in childcare institutions remains striking. Most of all, there is a disparity in the access these children have to kindergartens and to high quality public education, including afternoon care at schools. One of the most important reasons for this is the fact that the state only covers about half of the total costs of running kindergartens and schools, while local governments and parents are expected to contribute the rest according to their financial situation. Local governments in the economically isolated areas of Hungary do not have sufficient resources for the maintenance of kindergartens nor in order to provide high quality childcare. Another problem is that – despite the legislation that would otherwise give priority to poor children – the heads of crèches and kindergartens usually give priority to mothers with stable employment. As a result, the majority of poor children do not start kindergarten before the obligatory age of five. This, in turn, contributes to the greater number of poor children who later on encounter frequent problems in primary school (cf. European Commission 2004; OECD 2004). Women with good labour market positions receive greater benefits from the family policy system than women with bad employment records and prospects. They receive a maternity leave and parental leave based on their previous income, whereas other women are left with a flat-rate parental leave, which is of a very low standard and is by no means sufficient to cover necessary expenses (cf. Szikra/Szelewa 2008). This latter group includes a disproportionate

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number of Roma women. Families in small villages in economically remote areas are also put in a disadvantaged position. For the above reasons we can talk about a *"limited optional familialism"* in Hungary which primarily serves better-off parents with stable employment. There is little or no "option" provided for unemployed families, and especially the Roma and those living in small villages in remote areas.

Until very recently parental leaves were provided for three years, and from 2010 they will be shortened to two years. Theoretically, they can be used by fathers as well but in fact very few men go on leave. Policies to encourage a more equal sharing of caring tasks between men and women cannot be observed in either of the countries. The low amount of parental leave (which is maximized a slightly above the minimum wage in Hungary in 2009) and the prevailing patriarchal relations within and outside the families prevent fathers from performing a greater portion of care work: in Hungary only a little more than 4% of all the parental leaves are claimed by men. The feminist movement is rather weak in these countries, and in Poland it is still pre-occupied with women's basic human rights, such as the right for an abortion. At the same time, non-feminist women's movements are growing in importance and are increasingly shaping family policies in Poland.

Economic transformation had different effects on the welfare of women in the two countries. The economic 'shock therapy' in Poland contrasts sharply with the gradualist approach followed in Hungary. Far-reaching cuts in social spending were introduced in Poland, and access to benefits was restricted to the very poorest. Childcare services also deteriorated (cf. Szelewa/ Polakowski 2008). Hungary, on the other hand, introduced a generous unemployment scheme in 1991 (the duration and level of payment were later cut) and made family allowances universally available. Withdrawal from the labour market through easy access to disability pensions and early retirement cushioned the hardships of economic transformation in both countries. Importantly, the system of long parental leaves, split into an income-related scheme and a flat-rate provision system, was kept in place in Hungary. Moreover, a new type of parental leave was also established for parents with at least three children. In this case, the parent (usually the mother) who stays at home with the children is eligible to receive the flat-rate payment until the youngest child reaches the age of eight.

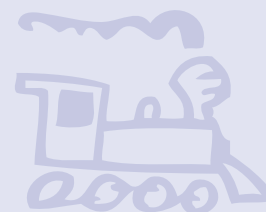
Regardless of their ideological affiliation, the new democratic governments in Poland were not very concerned with family policy issues (cf. Szikra/ Szelewa 2009). Although a traditional vision of a woman's role within the family and society was very popular among the new political elite, the policies that were authored in this period did not always correspond with the politician's declarations. Family allowances remained restricted to the poorest, and the level of extended parental leave was very low. The 'State's Profamily Policy' program, which passed in 1999, stresses traditional values and a positive attitude towards the Catholic Church. The document actually utilised the most important points of Catholic social thought, such as the principle of subsidiarity. Still, under the Kaczynski government a slight move towards more generous family policies started: the duration of maternity leave was extended to 18 weeks in 2006 and the length of maternal leave increases with the number of children extending up to a maximum of 24 weeks. Parental leave is linked to previous employment, though the maximum amount does not even reach one-fifth of the gross average income (cf. Szikra/ Szelewa 2009). This represents a strange combination of employmentbased social transfers (as the eligibility is linked to employment) and poverty relief (as the amount is not more than social assistance). Nor are most families entitled to family allowances, which means that the majority of families are without public transfers that would help them with the costs of childbearing. The newly introduced maternity grant, the so called "becikowe" illustrates the move towards more family-directed social transfers, but despite the pro-natalist rhetoric under the Kaczynski brothers, support for families remained marginal in comparison to other welfare transfers, such as pensions.

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In both countries, the decentralization of services resulted in a decrease in the percentage of children attending crèches. In Poland the percentage dropped from 5% in 1985 to just below 2% in 2002; in Hungary, the percentage decreased to around 9%, compared to 13.7% at the beginning of the 1990s (cf. Fodor et al. 2002; OECD 2004). While in Hungary the rate stabilized around 10%, in Poland this service can be described as being almost non-existent. In Poland, municipalities facing financial difficulties were either forced to introduce high fees, restrict access, or close down their crèches. In Hungary, there is a discrepancy between the capacity of rich and poor municipalities in terms of their ability to maintain crèches. The same kind of differences, but with higher enrolment rates, can be observed in the case of kindergartens [Figure 1]. The most important reason for the significant difference in childcare is that in Hungary it is obligatory for cities to set up crèches and for all local governments to provide kindergartens and schools with afternoon care. Thus, although there are major regional differences, Hungarian municipalities are required to fulfil this task. Because the central state completely cut their financing and because there is no obligation for them to do so, municipalities in Poland rarely run crèches and afternoon services.

In spite of all of this, recent developments in Hungary are contradictory. Although long-term and short-term programs against child poverty were launched in 2006 (cf. Magyar Tudományos Akadémia 2006), the resources necessary to achieve even the short-term aims have been drastically reduced since then. Contrary to the aims of the program, segregation of the Roma and poor children has actually increased throughout the country. At the same time, pilot projects in some of the poorest regions in Hungary have been operating successfully. It is important to note that support from the European Union through the Structural Funds has been utilized for meeting these projects' goals. Even though the last socialist-liberal government started its time in office with important reforms of the family allowance system (minimizing social assistance and increasing the level of the universal allowance), the reforms they issued in the latest part of their administration were headed in the exact opposite direction. In effect they served to decrease the universally available social transfers to families while increasing punitive and discretionary social assistance.

## SUMMARY AND POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

As demonstrated above, both types of *"familialism"* already existed in Communist times. I argued herein that the roots of the more generous and concise *"optional familialism"* in Hungary, and the non-intervening *"implicit familialism"* in Poland are to be found in the differing state formation processes of Hungary and Poland following the First World War. These processes had long-lasting effects and persisted throughout the varied periods of Communist rule. After the fall of Communism some important changes occurred, but they did not alter the two systems dramatically. In Poland, the rapid economic transition and general withdrawal of the State weakened the already existing services and put a greater emphasis on income-testing in the field of family policies. In Hungary, family policies remained more or less intact. Despite the deterioration in the level of universal payments after 1990, no sharp fall was experienced in the access to services. While in Hungary more generous family policies could remain in place partly due to popular support, in Poland there was no substantial political and popular support to improve public childcare services or income transfers. Regardless, there are significant disparities in the access to services and payments in Hungary based on class and ethnicity. There, a much wider range of support is available for better-off families, but poor and Roma children are often excluded from high-quality childcare institutions. Non-working mothers are excluded from the incomerelated parental leave system and are, thus, left only with the lower level flatrate payment. It is these inequalities in both payments and services that make me label current Hungarian family policies *"limited optional familialism"*.

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Family policies have an impact on the wealth/well-being or poverty of families and especially women and children. Furthermore they have an effect on the labour market situation of mothers and fathers, and they arguably have some effect on fertility rates as well. When evaluating Polish and Hungarian family policies, one can immediately see the limitations of the possible effects. Whilst *familialism* in general has a negative impact on fertility rates, *optional* or *implicit familialism* do not seem to make any difference in this respect. When comparing these factors to data from some of the “Western” and “Southern” European countries [Table 3.], Poland and Hungary are grouped closest to Spain and Germany. It is in these countries that – despite important changes that occurred in recent years – conservative gender roles and *familialistic* welfare solutions have the strongest traditions.

The fertility rates in Poland started out at a relatively high level at the end of the 1980s, whereas in Hungary the fertility rates had already started to decrease in the 1960s. By the early 21st century they were on the same – very low – level, which is partly due to uncertain economic conditions. At the same time, poor families continue to have more children. This is significant because it means that it is not primarily the economic situation of the family that has an effect on fertility. Women with better labour market prospects have less children. They seem to be discouraged by the long parental leaves and the lack of childcare services in the early years of their child’s life – and possibly also by the limited support they receive from their husbands in housekeeping and caring tasks.<sup>6</sup>

	Fertility rates (completed)	Female employment	Of which: part time	Employment of moth- ers with children aged 0–16
France	1.94	63.7	22.9	59.9
Norway	1.84	72.3	32.9	69.0
UK	1.80	66.8	38.8	61.7
Germany	1.34	61.5	39.2	54.9
Spain	1.34	54.0	21.4	52.0
Hungary	1.32	51.2	4.2	45.7
Poland	1.24	46.2	16.3	46.4

**Table 3. Fertility rates, female and maternal employment rates in seven European countries, 2006**

Source: *Babies and Bosses*, Volume 5, OECD 2006.

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<sup>6</sup> This latter problem has not yet been systematically researched.

As is already well documented, fertility rates in recent decades have been the highest in countries with high levels of maternal employment rates (cf. OECD 2007). Hungary and Poland, alongside other post-Communist countries, have relatively low female employment rates and very limited possibilities for parttime work. But what is strikingly different in these countries, in comparison to other nations, is the extremely low employment rate of mothers. Here, Hungary has the lowest rate among all OECD countries (cf. OECD 2007). The major difference between Hungary and Poland is that in Hungary “inactive” mothers have been on maternity leave for a number of years (especially if they had more than one child), whereas in Poland they have been mainly unemployed or were recipients of social assistance. Because of the existing universal, flat-rate parental leave system in Hungary and the lack of this system in Poland, a marked divergence can be observed between male and female unemployment rates between the two countries. In Hungary, the unemployment rate for women (8.7%) was lower than that of men up until 2006. In Poland, the female unemployment rate (14.7%) has consistently been higher than that of men. This fact contributed to female poverty in Poland, whereas such gender differences did not occur in Hungary (cf. Fodor 2006).

All in all, Polish mothers have been placed in a more precarious situation than Hungarian mothers, as they have had to rely on informal care of relatives and/or their spouses’ incomes to a much greater extent than their Hungarian counterparts. The reliance on sisters and grandmothers (whose early retirement is an indirect support for their children) is an important factor to be researched in more detail. Irrespective of the sharp division between Hungarian mothers with good labour market prospects (those with higher education) and those who are stuck in a stage of “inactivity” (typically with lower education and living in remote rural areas), it is nonetheless true that the possibility of economic independence or in the terms of Orloff, to form an “independent household” (1993), would be much more difficult under the conditions of minimal public support in Poland than in Hungary.

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Even during the Socialist era, the provision of day care services for small children was relatively scarce in Poland. The availability of kindergartens, and especially nurseries further declined after the political transition, and the decline was significantly larger in rural areas. The first two sections of this paper document changes in the regulation and provision of day care services in Poland before and after 1989. The final section briefly outlines a recent policy initiative aimed at increasing day care capacity.

DAY CARE FOR CHILDREN BEFORE 1989

Due to the after wave of the post-war demographic boom, which peaked in 1983 the number of children aged under 3 years was on the increase until the mid-1980s, when it started to decline gradually. The number of children aged 3-6 years slowly but steadily increased until 1988.

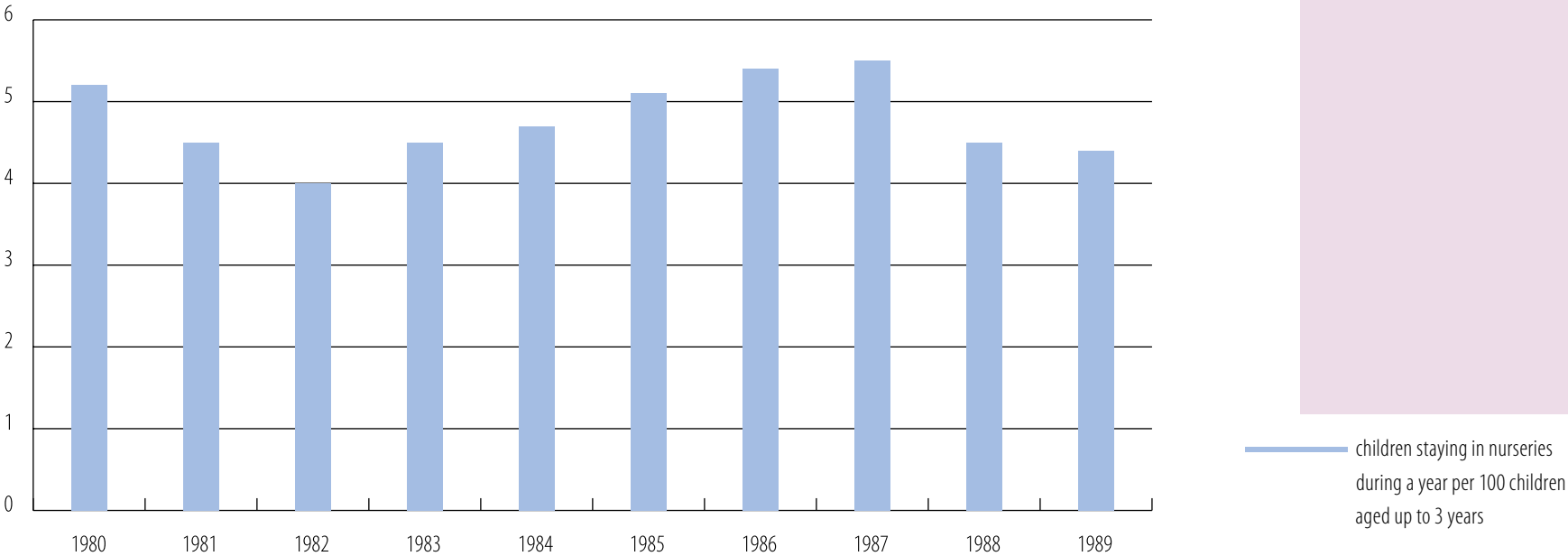


Figure 1. Share of children aged 0–2 years attending nursery, 1980–1989

Source: Own elaboration based on (CSO 1981-1990a)



## Regulation and provision of services for children under three years

Before 1989, the establishment and maintenance of nurseries and kindergartens fell within the remit of the public administration. Their financing was based on the state budget. A significant share of childcare facilities operated on the premises of state owned enterprises and was financed by these establishments. In addition, social and religious organisations were allowed to establish and maintain facilities providing day-care for small children (Muczyński M., Żyńel M., 2008a:11-12, 2008b:65.).

In 1980, about 1500 nurseries operated in Poland, altogether providing 103.5 thousand places. By 1988, the number of nurseries by 7% and the number of places grew by 3.3% to 107 thousand. These capacities were significantly below potential demand. In 1980, only 5.2 percent of children aged 0-2 years attended nursery. By the end of the 1980s, the average ratio dropped to 44, with slightly higher rates in urban areas.

In 1980, over a quarter of nursery places were provided by facilities in state owned firms. During the next decade, both their number, as well as their share in total provision decreased, so that by the end of the 1980s they offered less than a fifth of the total number of places (see Table 1).

Years	Number of places (thousands)		Share of places in firms (in% of total)
	Total	of which: run by firms	
1980	103.5	28.7	27.7
1981	106.3	28.0	26.4
1982	103.3	25.6	24.8
1983	101.3	23.7	23.4
1984	102.2	22.5	22.0
1985	103.5	22.0	21.3
1986	105.8	21.8	20.6
1987	106.7	21.2	19.8
1988	106.9	20.6	19.3
1989	105.9	19.9	18.8

**Table 1. Number of nursery places, 1980–1989**

Source: Own calculation based on CSO (1981–1990a)

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1980–2008



Provision of services for children aged 3-6 years

In the 1980s, the number of kindergartens, as well as the number of places available in kindergartens, increased considerably faster than the facilities for children below 2 years of age. During the decade, the number of establishments and places increased by 10 and 8% respectively. Most of this increase however, was concentrated in towns and cities: the number of kindergartens in urban areas increased from 5.6 to 7 thousand and the number of places grew by 8.8% during. In rural areas 255 facilities were closed down during the decade, and the number of places increased only by 6.7%. In 1989, the number of children attending kindergarten was on average by over one third higher than in 1980, in rural areas this increase amounted to 12%.

During the decade, about one in three children aged 3-6 years were provided institutional childcare. In case of 6-year old children, the ratio was about 45% (Figure 2). On average about 70-80 children could stay in a kindergarten. While at the beginning of the decade there were 110-120 children admitted per 100 places in kindergartens, by the end of the nineteen-eighties, their number dropped to 101. The children/teacher ratio fell from 17 children per one teacher in 1980 and further to 13 children by 1989.

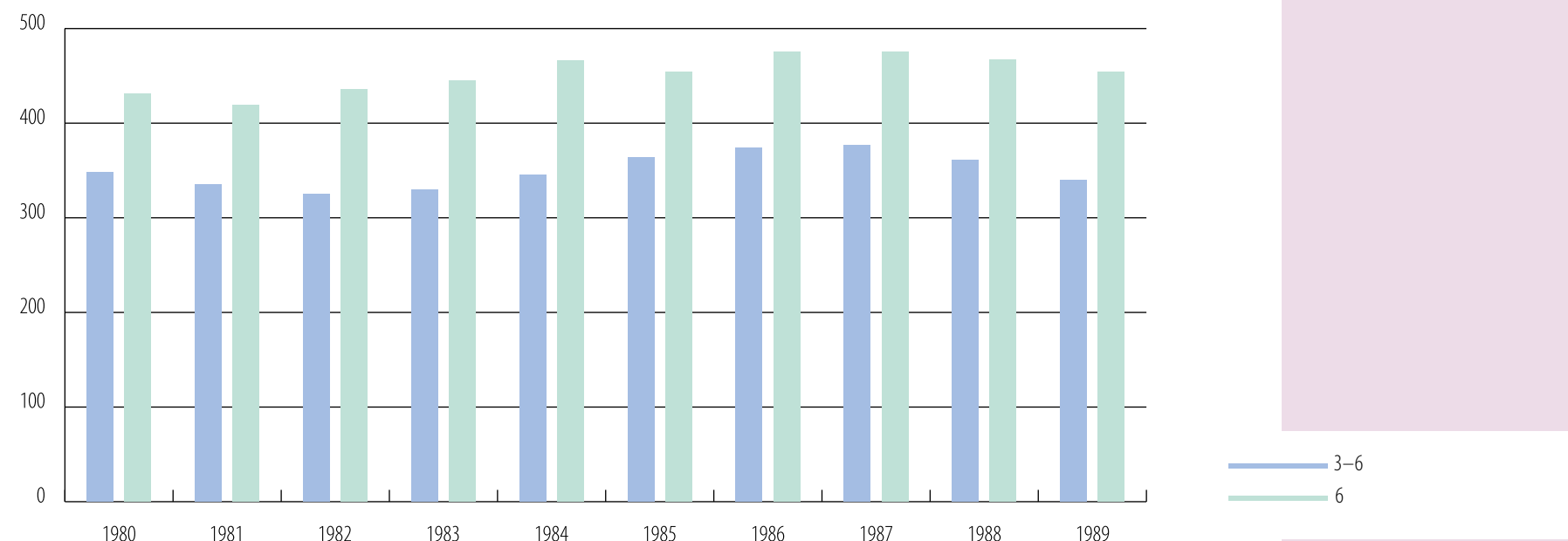


Figure 2. Number of places in kindergartens per 100 children aged 3-6 and 6 years, 1980–1989

Source: Own calculation based on CSO (1981–1990a)

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## DAY CARE FOR CHILDREN AFTER 1989

### Demographic determinants

Up to the mid-1990s, the number of births was decreasing in Poland as the women born during the period of demographic depression entered child bearing age. There was little improvement even when the next, much larger cohorts of women moved into their fertile years, due to postponement of marriage and first births, and a decline in total fertility. The number of children of nursery and kindergarten age has declined steadily.

### Regulation of day care for children aged 0-2 years

The change of regime in 1989 also brought significant changes in institutional day care services. Many facilities were closed or privatised, while private and non-profit childcare services remained underdeveloped. Beside registered and subsidised nurseries, day care for children aged up to 3 years may also be provided by childminders (registered or informal), or independent businesses (MPiPS BIP 2009:7). However, few families can afford hiring a childminder; this form of childcare is used by only about 2% of parents, as a result, the main burden of childcare responsibilities is shouldered by parents or their relatives (MPiPS BIP 2009:1).

Institutional day care for children aged 0-2 years is provided mainly by nurseries. From the legal point of view, these establishments are healthcare facilities.<sup>1</sup> According to law, nurseries provide healthcare services that cover preventive actions and childcare for children aged up to 3 years. Service fees are determined by the owner of the facility, and they do not include healthcare services (Art. 34b). Regulation of the status of nurseries, requirements concerning the premises, staff and appointment of the manager is also prescribed by the 1991 law on healthcare facilities and the ministerial decrees on its implementation<sup>2</sup>

As all healthcare facilities, nurseries are obliged to meet requirements regarding their staff and sanitary conditions specified in the Regulation of the Ministry of Health,<sup>3</sup> providing healthcare services including healthcare of a healthy child, diagnostic tests, and preventive actions (MPiPS BIP 2009:7-8). In nurseries, all care related activities concerning healthy children aged up to 3 years are treated as healthcare services, therefore they must be performed by appropriately qualified staff, such as nurses and qualified childminders.

The nurseries' personnel is subject to the regulations concerning working time of healthcare staff: their working time cannot exceed 7 hours 35 minutes per day and the average of 37 hours 55 minutes per week within the average 5-day working week (MPiPS BIP 2009, p. 9-10). The manager of the nursery must have completed tertiary nursing education or other health related tertiary education and at least 3 years of relevant managerial experience, or secondary medical education, completed specialist course and no less than 6 years or relevant managerial experience. Each nursery must have a statute, must be registered on the official list of healthcare facilities, and is obliged to keep medical records prescribed by the law.<sup>4</sup>

Nurseries must have playrooms or separate bedrooms, space to keep prams, a sanitary unit including toilets, basins and at least one shower and a separate place for washing chamber pots. Moreover, there should be separated units of rooms for various age groups, in particular for infants. The size of playrooms should allow at least 3.0 m<sup>2</sup> per child. Near the infant room, there should be space for open-air napping on a veranda or terrace. Children should be able to play outside

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1 Regulated by the Law of 30 August 1991 on Healthcare Facilities (Journal of Laws of 2007, No. 14, item 89.)

2 Regulation of 29 March 1999 (Journal of Laws, No. 30:300), regulation of 8 June 1999 (Journal of Laws, No. 52:543), regulation of 17 May 2000 (Journal of Laws, No. 44, item 520), regulation of 16 July 2004 (Journal of Laws, No. 170:1797), regulation of 10 November 2006 (Journal of Laws, No. 213: 1568).

3 Regulation of 10 November 2006 (Journal of Laws, No. 213: 1568).

4 Law on the Patient's Rights and the Representative of the Patient's Rights (MPiPS BIP 2009:10).

in a suitably equipped playground adjacent to the nursery, and the premises should not be accessible to strangers (MPiPS BIP 2009, p. 10-11).

Establishing nurseries is the responsibility of the local municipalities (gmina) (MPiPS BIP 2009:11).<sup>5</sup> Public nurseries can claim subsidies exceeding 50% of their operational costs and further contributions to cover meals,<sup>6</sup> and price subsidies on butter, milk, and dairy products<sup>7</sup> (MPiPS BIP 2009:13-14).

According to a Regulation of the Council of Ministers,<sup>8</sup> day care for children of age up to 3 years may also be provided by private or non-profit entities as well. Such establishments are not subject to the above regulations on nurseries, but are not entitled to the same level of subsidies. These may include private nurseries, clubs, and other forms of day care, which offer some elements of the complex services provided by public nurseries. There is a lack of the enforceable standards to be met by these forms of day care services (MPiPS BIP 2009:15-16).

### Availability of day care for children aged 0-2 years

Nurseries comprise the main form of childcare services for children aged up to 3 years. Since the beginning of transition, both the number of childcare institutions and the number of children attending has been on the decline. The number of nurseries dropped from 1412 in 1990 to 428 in 2000 and further to 371 in 2005 (Balcerzak-Paradowska B., 2008:17 and CSO 2008b). However, one should note that this period was also characterised by the declining number of children aged 0-2 years. Some new facilities opened in the last few years so that by 2008 the total number of nurseries reached 392. The number of places dropped from nearly 96 thousand in 1990 to barely 25 thousand in 2004. In 2008, nurseries offered a total of 29,2 thousand places.

A drop in the number of nurseries and places, translated into a drop on the number of children participating in institutional childcare. While in 1990 this form of childcare included 137.5 thousand children, by 2008, their number decreased to 54.7 thousand, while the number of children attending non-public nurseries increased. The difference between the number of places and the number of children over a year is explained by the relatively short duration of a child's stay in a nursery. Due to the fast rotation of children, seasonality and a 30% average absence rate due to sickness, average actual attendance is only about 65-75% of the enrolled children (Przybyszewska B., 2008:127). The average duration of a child's stay in a facility is 77 days during the year (MPiPS BIP 2009:3, CSO 2008b).

Following the transition, the already rather poor state of childcare deteriorated even further. While in 1990, the ratio of children attending day care provided by nurseries amounted to 4.2% of children aged up to 3 years, the next year it dropped to 3.1, and fell below 2% in 2002 (Figure 3). By the end of 2008, the situation slightly improved, so that there are 26 places in nurseries per 1000 children (Balcerzak-Paradowska B., 2008:17, CSO 2008b). The ratio of the number of places per 1000 children aged up to 3 years in urban areas amounted to 41, but this is 60% below the level in 1990.

At the end of 2007, there were 373 nurseries, of which 356 were public establishments founded by the local municipality. There were also 130 nursery wards in kindergartens, of which 120 were in public kindergartens. The vast majority of places in nurseries is offered by public institutions, however, their share has been decreasing each year. In 1995, they constituted 98.3% of all places, which dropped to 96 percent by 2008 (CSO 2008b:48).

In the early 1990s a significant share of places were run by nurseries established by firms, but their number quickly declined. In 1990, they still offered 20 thousand places, which constituted 19% of the total number, which dropped to 15.5 thou-

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5 The gmina is the smallest unit of public administration in Poland. It may cover a single city, a town and its neighbourhood or a rural area of villages.

6 Regulation of 7 February 2006 – (Journal of Laws, No. 25:186)

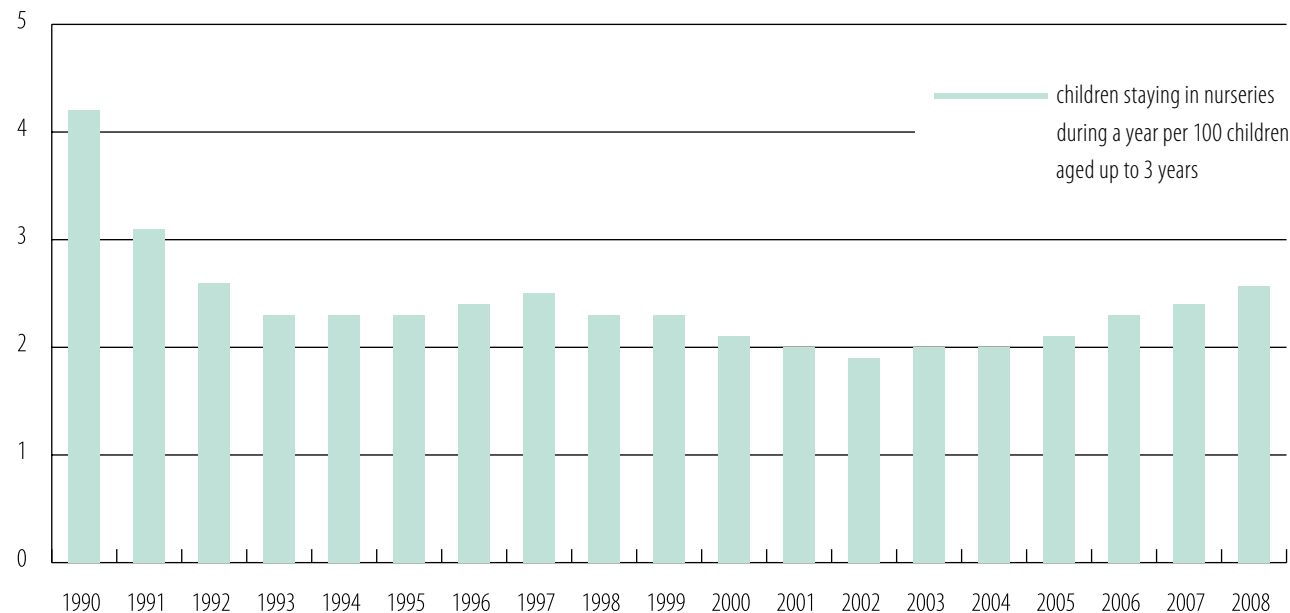
7 Regulation of 20 April 2004 (Journal of Laws, No. 11:65)

8 Regulation of 24 December 2007 (Journal of Laws, No. 251:1885) (MPiPS BIP 2009:15).

sand (16.2%) in 1991 and further to 3.2 thousand (below 5%) by 1992. From about 1995 it may be stated that this institutional form has ceased to have any significance: the number of places fell below 100.<sup>9</sup>

In 2007, nurseries and crèche wards employed a total of 6,800 full time staff, among them 37 physicians and 943 nurses. On average, one in twenty public establishment employed a full time physician. In case of non-public institutions, one in two employed a full time physician (CSO 2008b:49).

In 2007, over half of the children attending nurseries were aged 2 years. Over the last few years, there has been observed an increase in the share of children smaller children aged one and two years old, at the expense of 3-year olds: the share of the latter decreased from almost 20% in 2004 to 12% in 2007.



**Figure 3. The number of children in nurseries per 100 children aged 0-2 years, 1990–2008**

Source: Own calculation based on (CSO 1991–2009).

There is large regional variation in the availability of institutional childcare. In urban areas, the share of children aged below 3 attending nursery varies from 6.2 percent in Świętokrzyskie voivodship (similarly low level was also observed in voivodships: Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Wielkopolskie, and Pomorskie) to 13 percent in the Łódzkie and Opolskie region. The number of places in the establishments was significantly lower and oscillated between 30 to 70 per 1000 of children at the age of below 3. There is also a large gap in availability between urban and rural areas. According to official statistics, in 2000, 157 (about 42%) counties (powiat) did not have any nurseries.<sup>10</sup> In another 28% of counties, nurseries were available to a maximum of 2.5 percent of children aged 0-3 years. Only 10 counties provided reasonable coverage of between 11.3 to 18.7 percent. By 2007, the number of counties without a nursery decreased to 133. Of local municipalities (gmina), only 16% have nurseries or nursery wards and only 5% of these are non-public establishments (MPIPS BIP 2009:4-5).

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<sup>9</sup> Surveys carried out by I. Kotowska (cited by Balcerzak-Paradowska 2008:26) show that in 2007, 2.1% of the enterprises maintained childcare facilities and 3.2% of firms provided some contribution towards childcare costs for their employees.

<sup>10</sup> Counties (powiat) are the second level of public administration in Poland. As of 2008 there are 379 powiats, of which 314 are rural and 65 are urban areas.

## Day care facilities in Warsaw

Warsaw, the capital and also the largest Polish city, is typical of all large urban areas in Poland. There is a huge demand for nurseries stimulated by the rising educational level and economic migration of young people and the changing model of the contemporary family (Przybyszewska B., 2008:125). In the capital, there are 40 public nurseries, which offer 3508 places; this covers about 8,8% of the Warsaw population of children aged 0-3 years. In addition, the city pays for 35 places in non-public healthcare facilities (NZOZ "Puchatek" and "Bajka" in Białołęka District). At the beginning of 2008, over 2000 children were on the waiting list for nurseries.

In order to satisfy the growing needs of the local community, the Nursery Unit of the Capital city of Warsaw developed a plan to increase capacities of childcare. The programme consisted of opening *mini crèches* that operates as satellites of the main nursery in the neighbourhood. They bought 3 apartments for opening Mini Crèches, which will provide about 120 additional places for children. These will provide childcare for children in small mixed groups (ages 1,5 to 3 years) rather than the traditional separated age groups. *Mini crèches* will have playrooms for children, a dining room, a rest room, a bathroom, a cloakroom and a place for prams, a nurse room, social room, kitchenette and an outdoor playground. The mini-crèche will employ nurses and qualified childminders. Food, laundry, and administrative personnel will be provided for by the main nursery, run by the crèche manager (Przybyszewska B., 2008:127). As regards core staff, it was assumed that with each group of children in the crèche is looked after by three childminders (nannies) plus one auxiliary staff. An additional childminder may be employed in groups with more than 30 children (Przybyszewska B., 2008:129).

## Regulation of day care for children aged 3-6 years

Pre-primary education covers children aged 3-6 years and may be carried out in kindergartens, kindergarten wards in primary schools, or other forms of pre-school education with the provision that implementation of other forms of pre-school education covers children aged 3-6 years.<sup>11</sup>

According to the amendment of the Law on Education in 2007, facilities of pre-primary education (kindergartens and other, new forms introduced by the law) may be established by units of self-government, a legal entity, or a natural entity (e.g. a non-governmental organisation or a parents' association) (Kozłowska-Bałdyga, 2008:157). Non-public educational facilities, including kindergartens, may be created by legal and natural persons on the condition of meeting the requirement set forth in the Law on Education of 1990. Legal and natural persons are allowed to establish kindergartens after registering with the territorial self-government in charge of maintaining kindergartens, provided that they meet the formal criteria set forth in the Law on Education (concerning accommodation conditions, personnel, etc.) and have obtained the approval of the school superintendent (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2008:21). A non-public facility established in accordance with the rules set forth by the Law, enjoys the rights of a public facility and is entitled to state subsidies. This covers 75% of the running costs of public kindergartens and are paid through the local municipality (gmina) (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2008:21).<sup>12</sup> Other, unregistered private childcare facilities are also allowed, but they are not entitled to educational subsidies from the gmina budget (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2008:23).

The standard age limits in kindergartens are 3 to 6 years. However, in particularly justified cases, the kindergarten's director may accept a 2.5-year-old child. A child aged 6 years is obliged to undergo a one-year long pre-school preparation in

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11 Issues concerning the implementation of pre-school education are regulated by the provisions of the Art. 14-16 of the Law of September 7, 1991 on the Education System (Journal of Laws of 2004, No. 256, item 2572).

12 The local municipality is obliged to transfer the financial means for maintaining non-public facilities within the gmina's territory; whereas the financing of the facilities maintained by the self-government depends on the annual decisions of the Gmina Council (Kozłowska-Bałdyga, 2008: 157).

a kindergarten, or a kindergarten ward organized in a primary school. The obligation starts with the beginning of a school year including the child's 6th birthday.

A public kindergarten is a kindergarten that carries out free of charge teaching and education within the range covering at least the scope of the pre-school education curriculum, carries out recruitment of children based on the rule of universal accessibility, and employs teachers who have qualifications specified in separate regulations (Balcerzak-Paradowska B. 2008:20, BRPD 2009). This means that the local municipality cannot charge fees for activities carried out within the scope of primary school curriculum. However, in practice, children are often accepted by the kindergarten on the condition that they participate in the so-called full (paid) offer (BRPD 2009).

The fees charged by public kindergartens run by the local municipality are determined by the Gmina's Council. If a 6-year-old child's route from home to the nearest public day care facility exceeds a distance of 3 km, the gmina is obliged to provide free transport and childcare during the child's commuting, or a refund of the costs of public transport of the child and his/her minder if commuting is provided by the parents (BRPD 2009).

The character of fees paid by the parents varies. According to the surveys of Balcerzak-Paradowska (2008: 22-23), there was a practice in state nurseries and kindergartens to charge extra for better quality food. Following commercialisation, the fees were raised and regulated by law. In time, their amount was tied to the number of meals eaten by a child. The fees paid by parents of children attending nurseries cover the costs of meals, contributions towards the parents' committee, while in the case of older children, it depends on their participation in additional activities, e.g. music. Sometimes parents pay additional money for the facility equipment or cleaning. Additional fees are also paid for various activities: foreign language (parents pay 100% of costs), music (83%), corrective gymnastics (40%), dancing (100%), speech specialist (25%), trips to the cinema, theatre (90%). Moreover, the Gmina Council may establish fixed fees for the services of public childcare facilities regardless of the fees paid by parents for extra activities. Fees are regularly raised. The most frequent cause of a rise is an increase in the running costs of the establishment. Less often, it results from an extension of the range of services or improvement of their quality. Nurseries and kindergartens allow the possibility of exclusion from the extra activities, sometimes with exemption from payment towards sustenance. The most frequently applied criterion for granting exclusion is low income. Most nurseries and kindergartens run by parents' associations rely solely on fees paid by parents (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2008:23).

The kindergartens and kindergarten wards organized in primary schools first of all accept children aged 6 years who attend a one-year pre-school preparation. Next, they accept children of single mothers and fathers, whose mothers or fathers were granted a severe or moderate degree of disability or entire incapability to work or independent existence on the basis of separate regulations, and children who were placed in foster families.<sup>13</sup> Most complaints sent to the Representative for Children's Rights concern the principle that children should be accepted to kindergarten if both parents have full-time work. Despite the fact that persons on childcare leave are by law regarded as formally in employment, they are often discriminated against as their children are not accepted to kindergarten (BRPD 2009).

### Availability of day care for children aged 3-6 years

After 1989, the number of kindergartens decreased significantly. From 12308 operating in 1990, their number dropped to 7738 by 2005. The introduction of the compulsory pre-primary preparation for six-year old children in September 2004 caused an increase in the number of such facilities: by 2008 their number reached 8038. In rural areas the situation is typically less favour-

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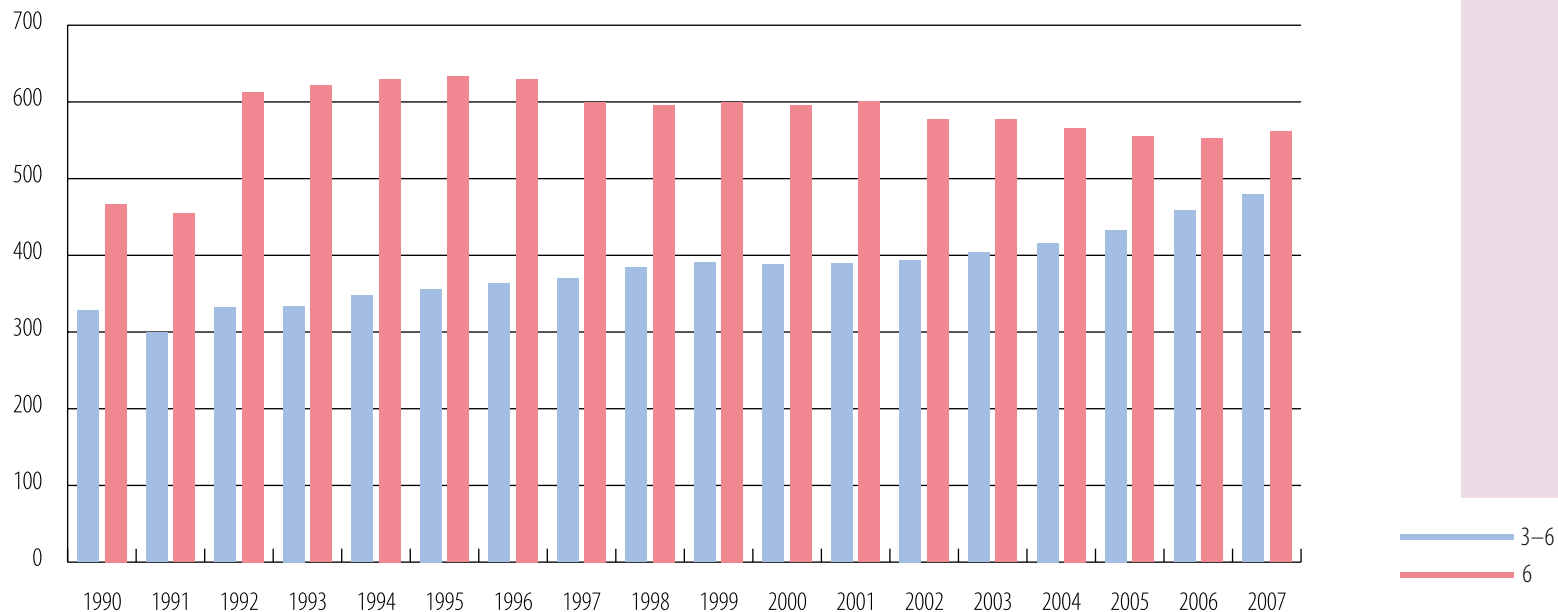
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13 Regulation of the Ministry of National Education and Sport of 20 February 2004.



able and the decline in the number of kindergartens is faster there. Since 1990, the decrease in the number of rural establishments was nearly 50%, compared to 24% in urban areas.

Altogether, since the beginning of transition, the decline in the number of children attending kindergartens has reached almost 25%, but this was caused mainly by the drop in the number of children aged 3-6 years. At the beginning of the 1990s, only 32.8 percent of 3-6 year olds were included in pre-primary education, while the respective figure in 2007 was 47.9 percent. This increase in the coverage was mainly caused by the inclusion of six-year olds in pre-primary education. In 2004, 98.1 percent of children aged 6 years participated in pre-primary education (Balcerzak-Paradowska B. 2008:17). In the school year 2007/2008, only 47.3% of the children aged 3-5 participated in pre-primary education. However, while in urban areas 75.2% children attended these facilities, the ratio was 39.0% in rural areas (CSO 2008a, p. 34).



**Figure 4. Number of places kindergartens per 100 children aged 3-6 and 6 years, 1990–2008**

Source: Own calculation based on (CSO 1991–2008)

During the analysed period, the average number of children allowed to stay in kindergartens varied from 70 to 90 children. The staff ratio did not change significantly. At the beginning of the 1990s, it was around 1:12 or 1:13, while over the last few years it increased to 1:15.

## CURRENT PROBLEMS IN DAY CARE SERVICES

Currently, the main problem is the lack of flexibility in the opening hours of childcare facilities. Most establishments have fixed hours of opening which are not adjusted to the varied needs of the parents. There is also limited availability during weekends, holidays and the summer vacation (Muczyński, Żyńel 2008b, p. 65-66).

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Surveys carried out in Opole, one of the smaller cities in Poland indicated that the introduction of compulsory pre-school for six-year old children in 2004 did not bring about an improvement in the network of public kindergartens, or kindergarten wards in primary schools. Over the last few years, 96% of 6-year olds living within the gmina territory attended the Opole kindergartens. Each year, 90-91% of the six-year old children participate in obligatory pre-primary preparation in public establishments, and 8-9% in non-public services (Koszyk 2008, p. 135).

Another problem is the level of fees charged for the services of nurseries and kindergartens. High fees are one of the main reasons behind the fact that families with lower income often resign from such services. In 2001, the fee for kindergarten childcare of one child amounted to 38% of the net minimum wage, and 19% of average female earnings. According to surveys, (Muczyński, Żynel 2008b, p. 65) this was considered too high by one in five families and caused a reduction of other consumption.

### RECENT PLANS TO INCREASE CAPACITY IN DAY CARE PROVISION

Aware of the above described deficiencies of childcare provision, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is determined to take action. On 31 August 2009, the Ministry published the "Assumptions of the Law on the Forms of Childcare of Children up to 3 Years of Age". This document lists the following three reasons for the necessity of improving services.

- (1) Socio-economic changes initiated by the systemic transition of 1989, which brought new challenges related to finding and maintaining a job. Paid work became much more intensive, requiring the constant improvement of qualifications, and employers' expectations concerning the employees' availability also increased. All of this resulted in making reconciliation between work and family responsibilities much harder, which in particular concerns women, due to their parental functions.
- (2) Profound changes in institutional childcare services for children up to 3 years of age. Many childcare facilities were closed or privatised, while the network of non-public childcare facilities is still underdeveloped. Few families can afford hiring a childminder and as a result, parents and relatives shoulder the main burden of childcare responsibilities.
- (3) The necessity to undertake actions aimed at the facilitation of reconciling work and childcare responsibilities. These actions derive from the obligation of Poland to reach the goals of the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union, and as part of that, to increase labour market participation. In order to achieve this goal, the EU postulates inter alia the application of various solutions facilitating reconciliation between family and work responsibilities for economically active persons.

The strategic goals of the proposed new regulation are to facilitate the development of diverse forms of childcare for small children, improve the standards of the existing childcare facilities of children up to 3 years of age, and support parents in both their procreative plans, as well as in the process of bringing up children. The proposed solutions are also targeted at allowing children's parents and guardians to take up work. It is assumed that the completion of the above objectives will also help raise the birth rate.

Proposed measures include a simplification of the rules of establishing and maintaining nurseries and a new framework and standards for creating alternative forms of childcare of children up to 3 years of age. The latter should provide access to diverse childcare for an increased number of families, at the same time improving the quality of services.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the issue of childcare and its broader context. In particular, it describes the development of the institutional framework, the outcomes of child-care policies and also the attitudes of citizens toward various aspects of caring for children. The main focus is on the public child-care system, i.e. services provided by officially registered and subsidised day care establishments ran by various types of public actors. The Slovak Republic is usually omitted from comparative cross-national analyses dealing with social policy or with the welfare state, mostly due to lack of data. This paper hopes to contribute to closing this gap in the literature.

The first part of the paper outlines some theoretical assumptions and ideas related to childcare. The next part focuses on institutional pathways of child-care policies in Slovakia in order to identify key trends and milestones in the development of this area. Then it examines empirical evidence on the availability of child-care in Slovakia and public attitudes toward care for small children and other relevant issues which frame its perception. The final section includes a summary and some conclusions.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

During the past decade childcare became one of the prominent issues within welfare state research (e.g. Anttonen–Sipilä 1998, Esping–Andersen 2009; Scheiwe–Willekens 2009), and has also begun to attract the attention of policy makers. However, it is not an unproblematic issue which would be perceived without conflicts and controversies. On the contrary, caring for children may be perceived as “the battle field” where clashes between very different perspectives and interests occur, derived from varying value systems and often opposing preferences in relation to the role of the state, the autonomy of family, and relations between family members. Therefore, promoting various concepts of care reflects – rather implicit – preferences as to the division of roles between the state, the family and the market.

Clearly, childcare is not only a matter of values and preferences: various other factors also influence its prominence in public policy. The provision of public child-care services is expected to have an impact on a societal level: it should improve female labour force participation, help to reconcile work and family life, and promote more gender equality. These arguments were partly developed on the basis of the feminist critique of mainstream welfare state research which didn’t take into account caring as a significant activity shaping the design of the welfare state. Feminist analyses emphasised the dominance of women in the unpaid care sector and “invisible” dependences that resulted from this distribution of roles. Unpaid care



was contested as something immanent to women's role. The so-called "reproduction work" was conceptualised not only as a matter of intimate or inter-family relationships, but also as public interest. Home care was seen as an important (but often not recognised and remunerated) precondition of the men-related commodification processes in the capitalist economy and entitlements (of men) to de-commodification (Knijn–Ostner, 2002). Public child-care services were expected to contribute to the removal of gender asymmetries in several domains of life. Based on these arguments, the welfare state research literature turned attention to the measurement of defamilialization, i.e. to the shift of care responsibilities from the private area (family) to the public one.<sup>1</sup>

Some of these arguments are also used in recent policy discourse both at the EU level and at the national level of the member states. At the EU level, specific targets regarding public child-care provision were established in 2002 (at the Barcelona summit) in order to "increase the rate of employment of young parents, especially women, and thus help achieve greater gender equality" (European Commission 2008). In particular, the Barcelona objectives were defined as "to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age" (ibid.). The link between accessible public childcare, increasing female labour force participation and gender equality could be found also in other EU strategies. For example, the Social Agenda 2005-2010 contained a commitment to removing barriers to employment for women and referred to the expansion of public childcare as a key instrument.

The increased interest of public policy and research in childcare provisions does not solely come from feminist inspirations. One of the most prominent arguments in favour of developing and improving formal childcare provision is based on the conviction that it could lead to strengthening the generation of human capital among preschool-age children (Jensen 2009). As Jensen points out, whereas the "issue of gender equality and female labour force participation have been on the agenda in previous decades without this leading to a break with the traditional patterns of childcare provision, human capital – defined as the stock of productive skills and knowledge embodied in the future labour forces – has just recently become a very salient issue across most countries" (Jensen 2009: 8). Moreover, the focus on the improvement of human capital has become a dominant policy motivation for supporting public child-care services, at the expense of other issues. This new framing of public childcare in public policy has also received backing from the results of OECD comparative studies on skills assessment of children (PISA) which confirmed a robust relationship between school outcomes and kindergarten attendance. As we will see later, educational-based arguments in favour of public childcare have also become dominant in the Slovak Republic during the transformation period (they existed also during the state-socialist regime period, however). Gender equality as a framework for the development of child-care sector has remained unexploited for a long time.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE BROADER CONTEXT OF CHILDCARE IN SLOVAKIA

The demand and supply of childcare are influenced not only by political decisions: other factors also play important role, which must be taken into account in order to understand institutional development and its outcomes. Among the most important factors there are processes related to reproductive and partnership behaviour. After 1989, the Slovak Republic experienced a decline in live-births and the total fertility rate. Between 1990 and 2002, live births decreased from approximately 80,000 to 50,800 a year. Then an increase has started and in 2008 there were 57,360 live births. Total fertility declined from 2.1 children per woman in 1990 to the historical minimum of 1.18 children per woman in 2002. Since 2003, an upswing has occurred and by 2008 total fertility rate has increased to 1.32 per woman (Potančková, 2009: 31). As Potančková points

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<sup>1</sup> As result, defamilialization leads to an increasing of the capabilities of families (Esping-Andersen 2009: 9). According to Esping-Andersen (1999), countries with a high degree of defamilialization can face the problems of post-industrial society much successfully.

out, “The unprecedented decrease and the subsequent rise in fertility rates were caused by a rapid postponement of child-bearing... However, women in Slovakia count among rather younger mothers in comparison with their counterparts in the EU-27 countries” (ibid.).

Significant changes occurred in the composition of newborn children. The proportion of non-marital live-births increased markedly. While in 1990 the share of children born out of wedlock represented 7.6%, by 2000 it jumped to 18.3% and in 2008 it reached 30.1%. During 18 years their share grew by approximately 22 percentage points. This suggests that the relationship between parenthood and marriage has weakened. In addition, the structure of households has changed from a long-term perspective as result of shifts in divorce and marriage rates (Bútorová–Filadelfiová, 2009: 52). One of the important processes, from a family policy point of view, is the gradual decrease in the share of two-parent families and a corresponding increase in the share of single individuals. In 1991 they represented 21.8% of all households in Slovakia and during the next ten years their proportion grew by 8 percentage points. The share of single parents also increased somewhat.

	1961	1970	1980	1991	2001
Two-parent families	81.2	78.5	70.6	67.7	56.4
One-parent families	8.4	8.6	8.2	10.4	11.9
Single individuals	9.3	11.9	19.8	21.8	30.0
Other households	1.1	1.0	1.4	0.4	1.7

**Table 1. Structure of household (% , census data)**

Source: Bútorová–Filadelfiová, 2009: 53

The number of preschool-age children fell in all age categories between 1994 and 2008<sup>2</sup>. The number of two-year-old children fell by 27%, from 73 642 to 53 648 children, that of three-year-olds dropped by 30%, from 77 408 to 54 121 children. When looking at a broader category consisting of children aged 3-5 years, we can see a similar trend: the size of the group decreased by more than 30%. The same holds true for children aged 3-6 years. As a result, pressure on child-care provision has weakened considerably. Several other important trends regarding families may have affected the demand and supply of childcare, but a detailed description of these lies outside the scope of this paper.<sup>3</sup>

Welfare state transformation in Slovakia was accompanied mostly by negative labour market trends, especially the rise of unemployment and long-term unemployment. At the beginning of the transition, rising unemployment was perceived as a temporary phenomenon. Some policy makers and experts even perceived it as a positive signal of “re-structuring in the economy” (Lubyova, 2000: 174). Later, it became clear that the high unemployment rate had a persistent and structural character. Another sharp increase occurred during 1998–2001 when unemployment<sup>4</sup> grew from 13% in 1998 to 19% in 2001. Long term unemployment increased also significantly during these years. While in 1998 it represented 6.5%, in 2002 it reached a historical maximum of 12.2%. Thus, within four years, the long-term unemployment rate almost doubled.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Data come from the website of the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic, <http://www.statistics.sk/pls/elisw/vbd>

3 For more information in English see for example Bútorová–Filadelfiová 2009, or Vaňo (ed.) 2008.

4 Unemployment and long-term unemployment rate are based on methodology of the Labour Force Survey.

5 Comparatively speaking, in 1998 there were some countries in Southern Europe (Spain, Italy) and in Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania) which had a higher long-term unemployment rate than Slovakia. However, four years later the Slovak Republic showed the second highest rate among the EU and candidate countries.

Since 2004, both indicators fell markedly: by 2008, unemployment stood at 9.6%, and long-term unemployment at 6.6%. The gender gap in the (long term) unemployment rate has persisted up to this day, with higher values in case of women.

Demand for public childcare could be affected by the extent of the part-time sector in the economy and its gender structure. Unlike some European countries (Netherlands, Sweden, or UK, for example), the overall share of persons employed part-time is very low in Slovakia. In the period 1998-2008 it didn't exceed 3%<sup>6</sup> and women are more likely to work part-time than men. In 2008, the proportion of women in part-time jobs was 4.2%, compared to 1.4% of men. The proportion of underemployed persons (persons who work part-time and would like to work full time or they work part-time at the initiative of employer) among women and men also differs, but in the opposite direction. In 2008 there were 47.6% underemployed women, compared to 59.2% of men.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDCARE POLICY

Let us turn to the development of child-care services in Slovakia. Before 1989, Czechoslovakia<sup>7</sup> as well as other state-socialist regimes in the Central Europe, had a well-developed, extensive sector of formal pre-school care. Its modernisation started in 1940s when a new, unified system of education was established. Pre-school services were part of the so-called educational facilities which belonged to the general educational system.<sup>8</sup> There were two types of the services – nurseries and kindergartens. Nurseries served for children up to 3 years and were governed by the Ministry of Health. Kindergartens were intended for older children of pre-school age and were supervision of the Ministry of Education. The general aim of the pre-school system was to support full employment of the working age population. However, it was not only the focus on full employment which played important role. Educational goals were also present in the system of pre-school care, especially in kindergartens: the official curricula emphasised pedagogical aspects. In 1966 and in 1978 the Ministry issued guidelines which stressed the link between pre-school facilities and compulsory education (Pajdlhauserová 2009: 66-67). Obviously, there were strong ideological pressures on the content of the upbringing and education of children, to internalize officially declared values and norms.

After 1989, the general framework of childcare changed. New social, economic and political conditions influenced the extent of provision of public services for small children, as well their perception both by the public and the policy-makers. Generally speaking, the interest of public policy in childcare provision as a tool for achieving the above mentioned goals was very low. This is indicated by the main policy documents which dealt with the reforms of family and social policy measures. Moreover, this lack of interest is confirmed also by the recently adopted "*Strategy for pre-school education*" which was approved in 2007 by the Slovak government. The new strategy mentions explicitly that after 1989 the role of pre-school education was underestimated by society in general, and by responsible official bodies especially. This statement, which appeared in an officially approved governmental document, reflects lowered ability of public policy to use of existing policy measures. The low interest in formal childcare as one of the main areas of welfare policy could partly result from a popular conviction among policy-makers that new societal and economic conditions require a reduction of the role of the state. The fight against "state paternalism", which was present both in public policy and academic discourse (Kusá 2008), affected the perception of a wide range of welfare measures. Preferences regarding the role of the family and women in caring for children played even more important role. All these factors contributed to the fact that pre-school public childcare was not a priority in the proposed reforms at the beginning of the 1990s.

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6 According to Eurostat data, available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment\\_unemployment\\_ifs/data/main\\_tables](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment_unemployment_ifs/data/main_tables)

7 The break-up of Czechoslovakia into the Czech and Slovak Republics happened in January 1993.

8 For more information on development during the period 1948-1989 see, for example, the document "Organization of the education system in Slovakia" which is available at the website EURYDICE ([www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)). EURYDICE is a network, supported by the European Commission, which provides information on Education Systems and Policies in Europe.



In order to analyse the development of pre-school facilities in Slovakia we have to distinguish between kindergartens for children aged from two years to obligatory school age on the one hand and nurseries (or crèches) for very young children (under 2 years old) on the other. The differentiation is necessary because the trajectories of these two forms of pre-school facilities differ significantly after 1989. As we already mentioned, nurseries were under the competence of the Ministry of Health. Care for these children was perceived more as healthcare than support of their personal and educational development. It was supported also by required qualification of the staff that consisted mainly of medical nurses and not of professional teachers or carers. The situation changed in 1991, when a new act on healthcare was approved. By this act, nurseries were removed from the list of health care facilities and they have not been included into any other system. This also implied that the state would not support external care for very small children and that they should be cared for by their mothers at home.

This state has persisted up to this day. As result, nurseries are not part of the healthcare system, nor the educational (or welfare) system. The main responsibility for their establishment and maintenance lies with the local municipalities. As there is no central government body responsible for nurseries, there is no general regulatory framework which would specify and regularly update basic curriculum requirements and standards in this area. During the last two decades no organisation was established which would set up standards on a regular basis in order to respond to the changing social and educational environment. This situation has further negative implications. The data on nurseries (their numbers, regional distribution, basic parameters) are not collected at the central level and thus monitoring of their performance and quality is very limited. This means that it is very difficult to conclude something valid about these services. There are number of municipalities which run the facilities for very small children and there are also some indications on price-differences between the regions, as well as between urban and rural areas. There is also anecdotal evidence that the private sector grew rapidly in this area and that its supply varies markedly according to the duration of services, number of children, time flexibility and last but not least, according to price. However, there is no reliable source of aggregated data and any demand for their collection in general.

The development of kindergartens shows a quite different trajectory. They have been a stable part of the educational system since the 1960s under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (as so-called “school facilities”). After 1989, several crucial changes occurred. Since the early 1990s, kindergartens can be established not only by the public authority but also by other bodies, e.g. churches and private actors. There are three types of these facilities in Slovakia nowadays: state, clerical and private. In 1994, the target group of kindergartens were extended by lowering the age threshold to two years. The extension of the coverage of kindergartens served as a reaction to the negative development in the sector of crèches and to the raising demands of parents of small children to use formal child-care services. Generally speaking, providing care for children aged 2 years in kindergartens is confirmation of the negative trends in the sphere of nurseries (children aged less than two years remain still outside of the systematic public interest). Later, a decentralisation of public administration was launched and municipalities obtained new competencies, including competencies in the area of pre-school facilities. Since 2001, towns and villages are responsible for the establishment of public kindergartens<sup>9</sup> and they have also responsibilities for several related activities (financial management and teaching methodology, etc.).

Despite the decentralisation process, kindergartens are still under the supervision of the Ministry of Education which is responsible for the definition of national standards, monitoring and control of the educational process. The Ministry has prepared several strategic documents in an area of pre-school education (Pajdlhauserová 2009).<sup>10</sup> Most of them have stressed the necessity to stabilise the number of pre-school facilities which experienced a decline in the early 1990s (from 4052 kindergartens in 1989 to 3342 by 1994 which represents a decrease of more than 17%). In 1997, the “Strategy for development of

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<sup>9</sup> Regional educational authorities may also establish such facilities in the case of kindergartens for children with special needs.

<sup>10</sup> A detailed review of important documents is provided by the “Organization of the education system in Slovakia”, available at the website [www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org).



*pre-school education*" paid attention to two crucial problems: the worsening qualification level of the pedagogical staff and the failing integrative functions of facilities in relation to the children from disadvantaged households. Ten years later, in 2007, a new Strategy was adopted, setting priorities which were later implemented through the Educational Act in 2008. By this Act, kindergartens were shifted from the category of "school facilities" into the category of "schools" and they were made to provide pre-primary education (labelled as ISCED 0) officially. This is a milestone in the institutional development of kindergartens, reinforcing their educational dimension and their relationship to primary education.<sup>11</sup> Kindergartens are now expected to support the personal development of children and create the conditions for further education, which has implications for curriculum and methods used in early development and educational processes. This aim is strongly reinforced by providing free of charge places for children aged 5 years and more (i.e. for children immediately before starting compulsory school attendance). Currently, kindergartens are guided by the *School Educational Programme ISCED 0 – Pre-Primary Education*. Children are divided into classes with a pre-defined number of children depending on their age.<sup>12</sup>

Parents pay fees for using services of kindergartens which can vary to a certain extent. There are two types of ceilings of the fees differing due to the type of establisher. Parents of children attending a kindergarten founded by the State administration body (regional school office) pay a monthly amount which should not exceed 7.5% of the subsistence minimum defined for a dependent child. Parents of children attending a kindergarten established by the municipality pay a monthly amount which should not exceed 15% of the subsistence minimum for a dependent child. Fees are waived in three basic cases:

- child is one year before the compulsory school age,
- child lives in a poor household<sup>13</sup>, and
- child is placed in kindergarten by a court decision.

To sum up the institutional development of public child-care facilities in Slovakia, we can make some general conclusions. There were two different trajectories of child-care facilities. Nurseries practically disappeared from public policy after 1990. They were removed from the list of healthcare facilities and were not included into any other category. They did not become part of the public discussions regarding the welfare state; both policy makers and researchers neglected the issue (with some very rare exceptions) and its potential consequences for achieving various social goals. As a result, systematic empirical evidence of their performance and quality is still missing. This has also affected subsequent developments in the area. Using the institutional perspective, we can conclude that neglecting nurseries was an important choice which systematically constrains the choices open in the future (Myles and Pierson 2002, cited according to Scheiwe–Willekens 2009: 2). This may be interpreted as a case of institutional stickiness (ibid.) of the nurseries within the Slovak welfare state. Kindergartens show an opposite trend, although the low interest of policy makers became partly evident also in this field. The target group of kindergartens was extended and the conditions for the entry of various actors were created. An educational bias was reinforced by several measures. There were efforts to increase the inclusiveness of child-care facilities in the case of vulnerable children. Moreover, the Slovak Republic expressed officially their aspiration to reach explicit quantitative targets defined at the EU level.

From the family policy point of view, state funded formal child-care services did not belong to the core agenda for a long time. In 2004, when the Strategy of Family Policy was updated<sup>14</sup>, the emphasis was given to the social services for families with dependent persons. But the political commitments in the document remained at very general level, without any suggestions on how to translate them into reality. The position of public childcare within the priorities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Family (MLSAF) could be partly explained by the institutional affiliation of kindergartens to the Ministry of Education, which is not responsible for family policy. In addition, services for very small children are managed by

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11 The educational dimension of childcare for children in kindergartens has been stressed also in several official documents, for example in the NAP/incl or in the Strategy of Competitiveness of the Slovak Republic (specific Slovak version of the Lisbon Strategy).

12 For example, a class for children aged 3–4 years may have up to 20 children; a class for children aged 4–5 years 21 children, etc. If there are some children aged below three years in the class, the upper limit is reduced.

13 "Poor household" refers here to households in so-called material need, which means that their income is below the relevant amount of the subsistence minimum. For more detail (in English), see Kusá and Gerbery 2009.

14 Originally, it was developed in 1996.

municipalities and they are not regulated at the central level (i.e. they are not part of agenda of the MLSAF). This institutional setup to some extent limits the powers of the MLSAF as the main authority in family policy, to act in this area. However, the MLSAF can use other measures to support the development of public child-care sector. For example, the design of parental leave has also reflected the general approach to public preschool care for a long time. Its duration reflected the idea that care for very small children should be the responsibility of family members. Also, its level was relatively low,<sup>15</sup> which may have been intended either to encourage mothers to enter labour market as soon as they can or as implicit support for the male breadwinner model (over 90% of benefit recipients are women). The recent increase of parental benefit to the level of the minimum wage,<sup>16</sup> implies more financial reward for care work, but only for those with a sufficient contribution record.

Recently, a significant shift in the area of family life and work reconciliation happened in Slovakia. The MLSAF introduced a new measure supporting participation of parents of small children in the labour market. The new “childcare allowance” is intended for one of the parents of children under three years. Parents have to work or attend secondary school or university and provide care for the child with the help of other persons, private entities, or child-care facilities. The allowance covers the costs of childcare of working parents (to the level of parental benefit). Parents have an opportunity to choose between parental leave benefit and childcare allowance. If they decide to work, they can arrange childcare by physical or legal persons or by child-care facilities and they can claim the allowance which covers the cost of care.<sup>17</sup> Thus, more flexible options have been introduced for the parents of small children in order to allow them to follow their own preferences.<sup>18</sup> Adoption of the Act on Childcare Allowance (No. 5612008) has been explicitly framed by several issues, most importantly the labour force participation of parents of small children. The justification attached to the draft Act even mentioned that this support is partly a reaction to the OECD recommendations concerning the length of parental leave and the labour market participation of parents. Beside the issue of family-work reconciliation, the act was also motivated by some pro-natalist expectations. Lastly, the act also made reference to the aim of increasing opportunities for individual choice.

## EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF FORMAL CHILD-CARE FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

Let us now examine data on the evolution of child-care services in Slovakia. As we have already mentioned, there are no national records on the number of nurseries, their structure according to type of provider, or the number of children enrolled, etc. This limits to a great extent the possibility to evaluate development in this sector. Fortunately, the European Union Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) allows us to identify some patterns of childcare for small children in European countries, albeit, since 2005 only. According to the first published results (Eurostat 2008, European Commission 2009), in 2006 Slovakia belonged to the EU countries with the lowest proportion of 2-years-old children cared for in formal arrangements (i.e. pre-school education, centre-based services). In the age group 0-2 years, only 1% of children attended formal child-care facilities for between 1 and 29 hours weekly, whereas there were 4% of this age group who attended formal arrangements for 30 hours a week and more (European Commission, 2009: 75). The situation is similar in other Visegrad countries. Data from the EU SILC shows that other arrangements (mainly care by grandparents, other household members, or relatives) played a more important role.

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15 With an option to supplement it with part time work.

16 This was introduced in 2007 as part of the Programme Declaration of Government 2006–2010. However, the rise does not affect all parents of children under three years. Parents who were unemployed before child birth or worked temporarily without fulfilment of conditions for maternal benefit will have entitlement for the benefit at the previous level. Mothers of very small children who decide to have another child will be typically entitled to benefit at the previous, lower level.

17 We can expect the role of private providers (for example, co-called “maternal centres”) to become more significant due to the Act.

18 In connection to the option to claim childcare allowance, since 2010 parents receiving parental leave benefits are not allowed to work.

	1-29 hours a week (% of all children aged 0-2 years)	30 hours a week and more (% of all children aged 0-2 years)
Czech Republic	1	1
Poland	0	2
Slovakia	1	4
Hungary	2	6

**Table 2. Children aged: 0-2 years cared for in formal arrangements as proportion of all children in the age group (%)**

Source: European Commission, 2009: 75

For kindergartens,<sup>19</sup> we use the year 1994 as a starting point because we lack some details relating to the earlier period. We know the precise number of facilities but we do not have data on additional indicators. Therefore, the tables in this section contain data for the period 1994-2008. In addition, we will present data only on kindergartens (which include also two year old children) as there are no national statistics available on nurseries. In 1990 (the first year of political, economic and social changes) there were 4025 public kindergartens in the Slovak Republic. By 1994, their number fell to 3300, and continued to decrease gradually until it fell below 3000 in 2005. In 2008, there were 2871 kindergartens<sup>20</sup> The decline in the number of kindergartens could be attributed to the negative trend in the birth rate, the decreasing size of the group of pre-school-age children and partly to the rise of unemployment. Kindergartens for children with special needs have also experienced a decline in their numbers (from 68 in 1994, to 43 in 2008). The growth in the number of private and church facilities have somewhat mitigated the above developments. Here, positive tendencies occurred: there were 11 private and 2 clerical kindergartens in 1994, which increased to 56 private and 42 clerical facilities by 2008. The average number of children per class fell from 23.6 in 1994 to 20.0 by 2008. This may signal a positive development, as teachers may be able to pay more attention to each child in a smaller group. The children per teacher ratio also improved during the period.

The inclusiveness of formal child-care is usually indicated by its coverage, measured as a percentage of children attending pre-school facilities among all eligible children in the given age category. First, we will look at enrolment rates relating to specific age categories. Table 3 shows that the highest proportion of children enrolled in kindergartens is among 5 years old children. In 2008, it represents 82%. During the period 1994-2008 it increased by seven percentage points. Coverage is much lower among younger children. One of the reasons behind is that parental leave benefit is provided until the child reaches the age of 3. During the last four years the coverage among 2 year-olds decreased by 10 percentage points, which was probably caused by crowding out, due to the efforts of the Ministry of Education to increase the number of older children in kindergartens.

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19 I'd like to thank to Mrs. Lipska from Institute for Information and Forecasting in Education who provided me relevant data and information.

20 Of course, when we look at the period 1990-2008, we can see that the number of kindergartens decreased by 28.7%.

	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old	3–5 years old
1994	12.52	47.51	61.82	74.59	61.30
1995	11.67	43.67	55.77	71.88	57.33
1996	11.90	46.66	59.09	78.06	61.65
1997	11.64	50.45	64.41	80.05	65.44
1998	12.45	52.96	67.52	90.05	70.61
1999	14.13	54.49	68.77	90.41	71.34
2000	14.55	54.19	68.12	85.24	69.26
2001	16.26	55.89	68.25	84.39	69.63
2002	17.73	57.33	69.71	85.75	70.99
2003	18.76	60.09	71.38	85.34	72.40
2004	20.58	60.59	73.65	87.41	74.14
2005	16.49	59.52	72.76	84.85	72.65
2006	15.15	61.96	73.78	83.94	73.19
2007	12.80	62.64	74.43	82.87	73.12
2008	10.05	60.93	73.01	81.78	71.73

**Table 3. The share of children in kindergartens (as % of all children in given age category)**

Source: *Institute for Information and Forecasting in Education*, [www.uips.sk](http://www.uips.sk)

Note: Compulsory school attendance begins at the age of 6.

To sum up, the number of public kindergartens and number of classes decreased after the collapse of the socialist regime. Despite that, enrolment rates for the majority of age groups increased in this period (keeping in mind negative trends during the last four years). However, the availability of care for small children (2 years old) is still inadequate. In addition, there is still a shortage of places in kindergartens, although it is not very severe, as statistics indicate. According to data from the *Institute for Information and Forecasting in Education*, 3010 applications for kindergartens were rejected in 2008 due to the insufficient number of places. This represented approximately only 2% of accepted applications. This number is much higher than in the previous four years: the peak was reached in 1997 with 7805 rejected applications. The data suggest that the number of unsatisfied parents does not represent a problem which should be solved by public policy. We do not know however,

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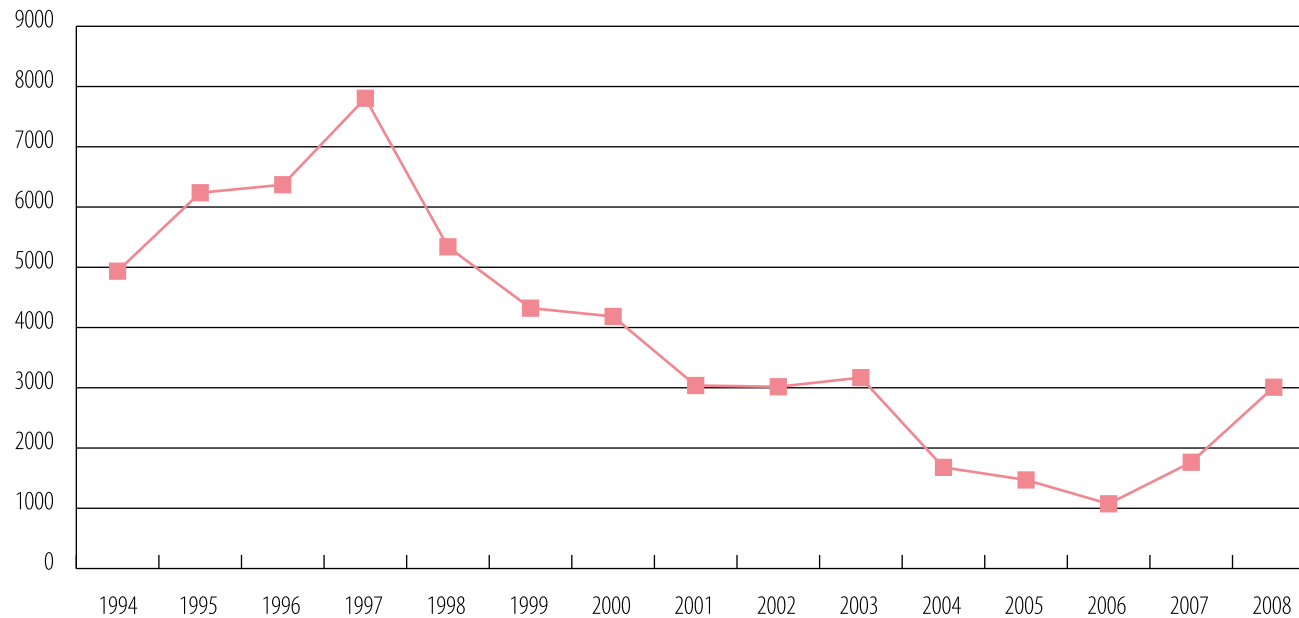
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how many parents do not apply for the placement of their child in kindergarten because they are discouraged by the level of the fees or by the knowledge that the local facility has no vacancies. Moreover, as the enrolment rate of two years old children indicates, only a minority of parents of very small children decides to use formal child-care service. We may speculate that in case of increased demand the number of rejected applications would be higher. This calls for an investigation of the demand side of child-care provision.



**Figure 1. Number of rejected applications for kindergartens**

Source: Institute for Information and Forecasting in Education, [www.uips.sk](http://www.uips.sk)

## PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDCARE

Policy development in any area does not occur in a social vacuum. It always relates somehow to the values and beliefs shared by the majority of population. The relationship between public attitudes and the content of policies is neither direct nor solid. It is a complex of mutual relationships, reciprocal pressures and influences. Despite this, it is very valuable to know this context in which specific policies are developed as an indication of their legitimacy. In the case of childcare it is interesting to find out whether there are clear patterns of preferences in the population regarding the provision of childcare in the family or in formal institutions. Such an exercise also allows us to examine the “demand” side of the child-care system. In this section we offer data on these issues which come from various sources. We use data from the cross-national survey European Values Study in order to identify public opinion on working mothers. Then we use data from two national surveys which were carried out at the Institute for Labour and Family Research in 2005 and 2006 (Bodnárová, Bernhauserová, Gerbery, 2005, 2006). They provide information on childcare preferences and attitudes towards child-care services.

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Child-care facilities provide external care for children, i.e. they commodify some functions of the family. The shift of care from the private to the public sphere is accompanied by opinions which stress various pros and cons. One aspect of these controversies is represented by the perception of the implications of the mothers' choice to enter labour market. The European Values Study contains a question which aims at identifying these opinions. It was part of the survey in all three years we have data for Slovakia (in 1991, 1999 and 2008). Respondents were asked to express the degree of their agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works". Table 4 shows the distribution of answers in three years. As these three years cover the whole period since 1989, we can see changes in public opinion regarding working mothers of preschool-age children from a long-term perspective.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1991				
Total population	21.4	50.4	26.7	1.5
Women	20.9	47.0	30.4	1.8
Men	22.0	54.1	22.8	1.2
1999				
Total population	18.2	45.0	29.4	7.4
Women	17.9	44.0	30.3	7.7
Men	18.5	46.0	28.5	7.0
2008				
Total population	13.8	27.1	38.2	21.0
Women	13.8	25.8	37.9	22.7
Men	13.7	28.5	38.7	19.0

**Table 4. A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works (% of answers\* in Slovakia)**

Source: European Values Study 1991, 1999, 2008, Slovak datasets provided by the Slovak Archive of Social Data, <http://sasd.sav.sk/en/>

\* Respondents answering "don't know" and respondents who didn't answer are excluded.

There is a clear shift away from the dominance of the view that the employment of a mother leads to the worsening living conditions of her child/children. While at the beginning of the 1990s more than 70% of respondents agreed with the above statement, 17 years later their proportion decreased to 41%. The employment of mothers of pre-school children in relation to the children's well-being is now perceived quite positively by the population in Slovakia. The majority do not see it as a handicap which leads to the suffering of small children. Behind the general shift some subtle changes occurred: for example,

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strong agreement became by 2008 a quite minor view among population. At the same time, the proportion of people who expressed strong disagreement with the statement rose dramatically. In addition, while at the beginning of the 1990s there were some differences between women and men, they practically disappeared by 1999.

The European Values Study is a cross-national survey which supports comparative research. Unfortunately, at the time of writing we had no access to data for other countries. However, some comparison is possible as the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Science prepared comparative tables for the third EVS wave in 1999<sup>21</sup> which include also the question we focus on (there is one limitation, however – only extreme variants of the answers are provided). In 1999, the proportion of people in Slovakia who strongly agreed with the opinion that mother's work has unfavourable consequences for the child was slightly above the European average (17%). With the exception of the Czech Republic, it was also lower than in the other two Visegrad countries (Hungary 25.1%, Poland 22.9%). On the other hand, the extent of strong disagreement in Slovakia was below the European average (8.3%), but it was higher than in all Visegrad countries. It is not surprising that the two countries with the highest share of people with a positive opinion in relation to the working mothers were Scandinavian (Denmark 29.1%, Sweden 28.2%). We can see that in 1999 – in the middle of a significant shift in dominant opinions regarding working mothers – Slovakia did not represent any specific exception, when compared to other European countries.

Data on the recent distribution of attitudes toward working mothers suggest that childcare carried out by persons other than mother is not blamed, but it is perceived (and practised) as something standard and unproblematic. This assumption is indirectly confirmed also by data from other surveys. Here we offer results of a representative empirical survey<sup>22</sup> carried out by the Institute for Labour and Family Research, which generally focused on identification of forms of care for dependent members<sup>23</sup> in families in the Slovak Republic (identification of "objects" and "subjects" of care), as well as the using of and demand for social services which help families. One part of the survey paid attention to the forms of childcare in families in Slovakia and it covered families with at least one preschool-age child (they represented approximately one third of the sample). The most of them had positive experience with the supply of pre-school facilities. 74% of respondents<sup>24</sup> reported that there is sufficient number of such services directly in their municipality (vicinity) which could cover demand of parents. Fifth of the households reported a shortage of pre-school facilities (Bodnárová, Filadelfiová, Gerbery, 2005: 34). Negative experiences were reported most frequently by the households living in two biggest cities in Slovakia (43% in Bratislava and 43% in Košice), as well as households from small towns. Looking at regional distribution of dissatisfaction, the highest proportion people facing inadequate number of pre-school facilities was in Bratislava region (with the capital city Bratislava).

One of the questions concerned ideal form of care for children in pre-school age during the working days. Respondents had to choose ideal form of care without any restrictions which would hamper its choice in real life (it means that they didn't take into account financial barriers, or other limiting circumstances related to their families). There were 8 options and respondents chose only one of them. As Table 5 shows, when all potential barriers are neglected, the most popular form of care is represented by pre-school facility. Almost half of respondents prefer this solution. External care seems to be suitable choice for significant proportion of respondents. The second most preferred option was mother's care which was chosen by the third of respondents. Care carried out outside of family and formal institutions, by paid child-minder, would be ideal solution for approximately 10% of population. These three forms of childcare absorb more than 90% of options. It is quite surprising that two of them are based on extra-family relationships. It indirectly supports evidence that mothers entering labour market aren't seen as a problem for their children.<sup>25</sup>

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21 Based on the publication from Halman 2001, available at <http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/old/evs.html>.

22 The "Survey on care demands and provision of services for families with dependent members" was taken on a representative sample of 1069, all adults aged 25 and older who provided information for their household. The age threshold was chosen in order to analyse households with at least one child in pre-school age (Bodnárová, Filadelfiová, Gerbery, 2005).

23 The category of dependent members consisted of children in pre-school age, disabled children, disabled adult, older people requiring regular care and persons who were ill during the survey.

24 Again, respondents provided opinion in the name of the whole household (only households with at least one child were included into this part of the survey). We are aware of potential problems arising from this survey design.

25 Authors of the research also compared the order and intensity of preferred forms of childcare with actual forms used by the families. This yielded some interesting findings: for example, while only 4% of households use the services of a paid child-minder (provided in the family's home) occasionally and only 0.4% regularly, as an ideal form it attracts more attention, as the table shows.



Forms of care	Preferences (%)
Pre-school facility	46.8
Mother's care	33.7
Paid child-minder (care provided in family)	10.8
Grandparents	5.1
Paid child-minder (care provided in his/her house/flat)	2.1
Father's care	0.3
Not able to choose	1.3

**Table 5. Preferences on the ideal form of care for pre-school children (% of answers), 2005**

Source: Bodnárová, Filadelfiová, Gerbery (2005)

We have seen that the majority of households have positive experiences with the availability of pre-school services in their municipalities. Physical accessibility is only one aspect of general satisfaction with the provision of such services. There are also other dimensions relating to the “content” of service or to its organisation, for example. The data from the survey offer insight into preferences of respondents regarding improvement in these fields. It provides picture of expectations connected to the formal child-care sector. We mention only four items which received the highest support from the respondents.<sup>26</sup> The most frequent request concerned opportunity to learn foreign language or to improve some skills (score = 50). It is an interesting moment because expectations of parents related mostly to the activities which have clear educational character. Next three most frequent preferences focused on organizational dimension of child-care provision: more individual access to children (score = 48), improving ratio “teachers to children” (score = 31) and more flexible opening hours (score = 31). Distribution of preferences depended on education of respondents (who provided answers in the name of households). While among people with elementary education lower fees and flexible hours became the most popular choice, respondents with university education preferred mostly more individual attention to children and improvement of the teachers – children ratio Bodnárová, Filadelfiová, Gerbery, 2005: 35).

The *Survey on care demands and provisions of services for families with dependent members* shows that despite the more or less stable decline in the number of pre-school facilities parents do not face a radical shortage in supply (they are satisfied with it, mostly). We have to keep in mind that the survey was carried out in 2005 when the number of rejected applications approached the bottom values and enrolment rates for various age groups were above the lowest levels. According to the survey, pre-school facilities belong to the most preferred forms of care for pre-school children. Unfortunately, the survey did not differentiate between nurseries and kindergartens, therefore only a general picture is available. The survey also confirmed that pre-school facilities are not only perceived an ideal form of care but they represent a real choice for a significant share of families in Slovakia (50% of households in the sample use them regularly, 3% occasionally). Moreover, the following rule appeared: the older the children, the higher utilization of child-care facilities.<sup>27</sup> According to the data, other forms of external care (care provided by child-minders) are less popular, but there is some potential for their expansion as the comparison of their

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<sup>26</sup> Respondents chose two items from the list of 9 suggestions on how to improve pre-school facilities. As authors counted the score for each item, the total sum of preferences (for all items) exceeded 100%.

<sup>27</sup> They were regularly used especially by parents with children aged 5 and 6 years.



real utilization and ideal preferences shows. Parents would appreciate it if pre-school facilities would give more emphasis on learning of foreign languages as well as on improving individual work with children.

The survey mentioned above provided evidence on preferred forms of care. The question is how external child-care provision is perceived in a broader context of family policy measures. Does it still represent one the most important policy tools for families? Or are there any other measures seen as the most important? This perspective on child-care provision is offered by the empirical survey of “Young Families”.<sup>28</sup> One part of the survey inquired about the opinion of young couples regarding family policy measures. Young couples (both with children and childless) answered a series of questions regarding the importance of family policy measures. Generally it turned out that most of them prefer the increase of financial transfers (78.9%) to the expansion of social services (21.1%). A stronger preference for services was present only among persons with university education (33.3%). In addition, respondents were asked to select three family policy measures from the list (containing 15 items) and rank them according to their importance. These policy measures did not reflect the actual situation in the country, but were formulated as suggestions or “ideal cases”. Thus respondents decided between various well-designed interventions.

Family policy measures	Preferences (%)
Well-paid maternal leave	36.8
Well paid and adequately long parental leave	21.3
Affordably priced housing for families with children	11.7
Adequately high child allowances	8.5
Good availability of kindergartens with quality care and acceptable prices	8.2
Part-time and flexible working hours for parents with small children	3.6
Good availability of services and facilities for children under 2 years with quality care and acceptable prices	2.8
Others	7.1
Total sum	100.0

**Table 6. Perception of the most important family policy measures by young couples (%)**

Source: Bodnárová–Bernhauserová–Gerbery 2006: 32

As Table 6 shows, well-paid maternal leave was most often chosen as the most important measure of family policy. More than one-third of young couples perceive it as the most important part of family policy package. A still quite significant share of young couples considers well paid parental leave as the most important family policy measure. We can see that (well-designed) services for small children do not belong to the interventions which would attract much attention of this specific category of the population. That is especially true for services for very small children.

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28 This was taken as part of a broader research project “Family – Employment – Education”, originally developed in the Czech Republic by the Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs and then also the Institute for Labour and Family Research has been invited to take part. The sample consisted of young couples (20–35 years old), three quarters of households had at least one child aged 3–7 years and the fourth part of the sample included childless couples (Bodnárová–Bernhauserová–Gerbery, 2006: 1).

To sum up, survey results suggest that young people prefer financial transfers to social services. In addition, interventions which allow parents to stay at home with children attract attention mostly. These results should be interpreted with caution. Firstly, they reflect the opinion of a specific group of young families (including also childless couples). Secondly, we should keep it in mind that we are talking about some kind of projections and that in reality people make often different decisions. Moreover, it is possible that responses reflect dissatisfaction with existing measures (i.e. interventions which work quite well are not perceived as the most important). Nonetheless, we believe the survey provides an interesting and valuable perspective which supplement findings we have mentioned earlier.

## CONCLUSION

The past 20 years has been a turbulent period in the evolution of public childcare services in Slovakia. Its general institutional development has been to a certain extent shaped by decisions made at the beginning of the nineties. The removal of nurseries from under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and the fact that they were not included into the responsibility of any other central body had negative implications for the development of services for very small children. Subsequent changes were characterised by the lack of a central authority which would frame their functioning (by setting standards on regular basis), collect data at the central level and provide information on the performance and quality of nurseries ran by municipalities or by private actors. All these consequences are partly the result of low interest of policy makers in extra-familial care for very small children, dominant beliefs regarding the role of the family and especially of women, along with widespread neo-liberal ideas on the reduced role of the welfare state in the early 1990s. From an institutional theory point of view, this decision constrains the choices open in the future. Therefore, we can identify some path-dependency in the institutional development of public services for very small children in Slovakia.

The decisions regarding nurseries also affected the development of kindergartens as they had to lower the age threshold for children in order to compensate for shortages in nurseries. The fate of kindergartens followed a very different institutional trajectory. Attention paid to them gradually grew and since the second half of the 1990s there were several efforts to prepare strategic documents which would provide general guidelines for the sector. Public policy and expert discourse stressed mainly the pedagogical and educational aspects of childcare in kindergartens. Several steps were made in order to increase the inclusiveness of kindergartens in relation to vulnerable groups (children from poor families, disabled children). The potential contribution of kindergartens to boosting of female labour force participation and to supporting of gender equality had been neglected for a long time. However, the situation has changed during the past few years. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, which acts as a central authority in the area of family policy, has limited power to directly influence the preschool facilities network, it has adopted a measure which supports the return of parents to the labour market and their use of external child-care facilities.

Today, public policy faces the challenge of recalibrating the system of public childcare in order to include smaller children and create opportunities for various choices which would accommodate the varying needs of parents. Any effort to change the system should start from a serious and in-depth knowledge of the strength and weaknesses of the current system. Therefore, as a first step, we need regular surveys and research on the implications of day care provision for a broader range of family policy measures. Only evidence-based and responsive policy can successfully address potential problems and challenges.

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